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# **A CENTURY OF WELSH MYTH IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

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**Donna R. White**

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Myth in Children's  
Literature*

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# *A Century of Welsh Myth in Children's Literature*

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*Donna R. White*

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*for Bat and Gomer*

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# Introduction

Myth, legend, and folktale have been entrenched in children's literature for several centuries—possibly longer, if we take account of the heritage of oral storytelling and the development of chapbooks, both of which included children among their wider audience. Throughout history, shanachies, scops, and bards in every civilization have retold and reworked traditional materials, providing cultural continuity for succeeding generations. Many Disney films represent modern adaptations of the old tales, and though seemingly aimed at a young audience, the films usually appeal to adults as well, as the traditional tales have always done. In recent times the same materials have become a rich source of inspiration for creative writers; each decade of the twentieth century has seen the publication of new novels influenced by the old stories. The current interest in ethnicity and multiculturalism has created a new market for books based on cultural uniqueness, and authors often draw on the myths and legends of their cultural heritage to add symbolic significance to their works. Writers also borrow from the traditional tales of cultures not their own—a practice which, when successful, adds a touch of wonder and a flavor of the exotic to the resulting story. In most cases, when writers incorporate elements of ancient tales in their work, the resulting fiction is labeled fantasy.



Fantasy is a direct descendant of traditional literature via medieval romance. The magical powers of gods, legendary heroes, and the various inhabitants of fairyland have been bequeathed to the denizens of fantasy's Secondary Worlds, many of whom show a close familial resemblance to the trickster gods, frost giants, ogres, and witches who are their forebears. Adult readers generally meet only the contemporary incarnations of these magical figures, but children, long considered the primary audience for traditional literature, can enjoy the full range of stories from timeless myth to modern fantasy.

As an audience children stand in a peculiar position. Because of our attitudes toward children and childhood—strongly influenced by John Locke's philosophy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idiotic educational theories, and the Romantic era's idealization of the child—writers approach this special readership much differently than they would an adult audience. Some concepts, situations, and events, we believe, are inappropriate for children, who lack certain kinds of knowledge and experience and who are (we hope) innocent and pure. Myth and legend and folktale are loaded with such inappropriate material, so they often undergo a sea change before they are offered to children. Kevin Crossley-Holland, for instance, includes in *The Norse Myths* (intended for adults) an incident in which a giant's daughter menstruates into a river, causing it to flood; his selection of Norse myths for children, *Axe-Age, Wolf-Age*, omits the giant's daughter. When the traditional material is adapted for children's fantasy, the author has to make similar choices about what to include and what to take out.

Because the child audience affects the material, it is instructive to examine a selected group of traditional stories from the time it was first included in children's literature to the present, exploring the various methods editors and writers have employed to wrestle the material into submission. Anyone who has glanced at the title of this volume will know that I have chosen to look at Welsh traditional material as it has been used in children's literature. Although I am not the first person to have examined the influence of Welsh traditional literature on modern fantasy, I am the first to look at the material historically and chronologically as children's literature. In many ways, the present volume can be viewed as a companion piece to an earlier work in this series, *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy*, by C. W. Sullivan III (Greenwood, 1989). Whereas Sullivan explores the aesthetic and thematic uses of the Welsh sources, my approach is historical, cultural, biographical, and audience specific. Even though Sullivan discusses three of the major

figures whose works are also examined in this study, our two volumes are disparate and complementary.

Some of the most ancient traditional tales still extant come from the Celtic cultures of France and the British Isles, whose languages have a claim to be the oldest in Europe. Among these tales are four native Welsh legends collectively known as the Mabinogi. Since 1845, when Lady Charlotte Guest finished translating these stories into English, they have been called “The Mabinogion,” but scholars now agree that Guest based her title on a scribal error, since the word “mabinogion” appears only once in the original text and has no provenance in Welsh.<sup>1</sup> Guest was not to blame for the mistake; she was following the usage of the respected Welsh scholar Dr. Owen Pughe, who had published partial translations of the stories in 1796 and 1829. The more appropriate Welsh word is “mabinogi.” Guest also included in her translation a number of tales which are not connected to the four stories that proclaim themselves the Mabinogi, but which she found in her medieval sources—the manuscripts known as the Red Book of Hergest and the Book of Taliesin. As a result of these errors and the popularity of Guest’s translation, the eleven medieval Welsh tales collected in her three-volume work (minus “Taliesin”) have become known as the Mabinogion. To differentiate this larger group of stories from the four inter-related native tales, Celtic scholars now refer to the latter as, variously, the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, the Four Branches, or simply the Mabinogi. The collection of eleven tales is still known as the Mabinogion, and most modern translations continue to keep them together.

The four individual, interconnected tales that make up the Mabinogi are “Pwyll Prince of Dyfed,” “Branwen Daughter of Llyr,” “Manawydan Son of Llyr,” and “Math Son of Mathonwy.” The other stories included in the Mabinogion are “The Dream of Macsen Wledig,” “Lludd and Llefelys,” “Culhwch and Olwen,” “The Dream of Rhonabwy,” “The Lady of the Fountain,” “Peredur Son of Efrog,” and “Gereint Son of Erbin.” The last three are French-influenced Arthurian romances, “Culhwch and Olwen” is a native Welsh Arthurian tale (the oldest known Arthurian tale), and the rest are individual native Welsh tales. Guest included the tale of Taliesin in her collection, but she took that from a different source—the Book of Taliesin—and later editors and translators dropped it from the Mabinogion. The discovery of other manuscripts has prompted additional changes. Guest’s version is a translation from the Red Book of Hergest, but later translators have depended more on the version of these tales found in the White Book of Rhydderch and the

partial accounts in various Peniarth manuscripts, none of which were available when Guest undertook this first complete English translation.

Lady Charlotte Guest was an amazingly energetic and accomplished Englishwoman who managed to learn medieval Welsh and translate these ancient tales in the midst of an active social life, her fourth and fifth pregnancies, and the business demands of her husband's enormous ironworks, for which she was chief accountant and secretary. Although she had the assistance of two Welsh scholars in transcribing the medieval texts into modern orthography and proofreading her work, the translation itself was the result of her own determination and hard work, as were the voluminous scholarly notes that accompanied the text.

Longmans published Guest's translation in seven volumes between 1838 and 1845, then issued the popular three-volume edition in 1849. The work met with great success, no doubt in part because of the Romantic revival. Guest emphasized the Arthurian romances in the collection and provided French, German, Danish, Swedish, and Icelandic analogues. According to one of Guest's biographers, her translation of the *Mabinogion* was the first book Alfred Lord Tennyson bought after his marriage—a purchase that led to a lifetime friendship between the two authors and provided the inspiration for *The Idylls of the King* (Bessborough 8).

Guest's own writing talents also contributed to the success of her translation. Her flowery biblical style suited the medieval material. As two later translators assessed her work, it is "a charming and felicitous piece of English prose, and has been justly esteemed by every succeeding generation of readers as a classic in its own right" (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* xxxi). It is not, however, children's literature, but rather a complex and detailed work of scholarship intended for highly educated adults.

The *Mabinogi* found its way into English-language children's literature soon after Lady Charlotte Guest's translation was published. Many retellings have appeared in the century and a half since then, and in recent decades the Four Branches have inspired some of the best children's fantasy written in English. Surprisingly, most of it springs from the imaginations of American and English authors rather than from Anglo-Welsh writers. The non-Welsh seem always to have been intrigued by the Celtic imagination.

Children's books based on the *Mabinogi*, invariably fantasies, have done well in literary competitions. Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* won both the *Guardian* Award and the Carnegie Medal—the two most prestigious children's literature awards in the United Kingdom. *The High*

*King* (1968), the final volume of Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain*, won the American Library Association's Newbery Award as the most outstanding children's book of its year, and an earlier volume was a Newbery Honor Book. Jenny Nimmo, a relative newcomer writing in Wales, won both the Smarties Grand Prix and the Tir na n-Og Award for *The Snow Spider*, the first book of a trilogy based on the Mabinogi. All of these authors drew upon different aspects of their Welsh source to create original works that somehow manage to retain a flavor of their Celtic roots—that indefinable, amorphous, multifaceted substance called “Welshness.”

In order to understand the lure of these Welsh stories and their importance as an influence in children's fantasy, it is necessary to trace the history of the Mabinogi as children's literature, particularly as English-language children's literature, for, as in any recounting of literary influences, this is a tale of many interlinking literary elements, as intricate as a Celtic knot. Weaving in and out and through the story are two primary works: Lady Charlotte Guest's translation and Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*. Without these two works none of the children's books I will be discussing would have existed.

As literature, books based on the Four Branches fall into two categories: (1) retellings as myth or legend and (2) fantasy inspired partially or wholly by the Welsh tales. Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the retellings published for children between 1881 and 1988; chapters 3 through 6 discuss the imaginative literature that borrows elements from the Mabinogi.

A note on Welsh names: different translators spell Welsh personal and place names in various ways. For the sake of consistency, I have spelled the names as they appear in the Jones and Jones edition of *The Mabinogion* (second revised edition, 1989). When the names are part of titles or appear in direct quotation, I have used the spelling given by the particular author or editor.

## SYNOPSIS OF THE FOUR BRANCHES OF THE MABINOGI

### Pwyll Prince of Dyfed

While hunting one day, Pwyll is separated from his companions and sets his dogs on a stag that has been brought to bay by another pack. The other pack belongs to Arawn, king of Annwn [the Welsh underworld], who is offended by Pwyll's discourtesy. To make amends, Pwyll agrees to exchange places with Arawn for one year, at the end of which Pwyll

will fight Arawn's enemy Hafgan. Having been transformed into the image of Arawn, Pwyll lives out his year at Arawn's court without anyone noticing the exchange. After he defeats Hafgan, Pwyll returns to his own shape and his own country. When Arawn returns to his court, he discovers that Pwyll has resisted the temptation to sleep with the queen; this honorable conduct cements a friendship between the two rulers and their realms.

Soon after he returns home, Pwyll visits a magical hill and spies a beautiful maiden on a horse riding by. He sends a rider after her, but she is too fast for him. The next day Pwyll sees the maiden again and once more sends a rider after her, with no better success. Finally Pwyll chases her himself, and she allows herself to be caught. The maiden is Rhiannon, and she has decided she would rather marry Pwyll than Gwawl, the man to whom she is affianced. Following Rhiannon's suggestions, Pwyll wins her hand, loses it again by his rash behavior, and finally wins her from Gwawl by an underhanded trick.

Eventually the couple has a son, but on the night of his birth he disappears. The maidservants, fearing they will be blamed, smear the sleeping Rhiannon with blood and claim she ate the child. Her punishment is to stand at the gate and tell visitors her story, offering to carry them to the palace.

Meanwhile, in another part of the kingdom, a landholder named Teyrnnon keeps watch in his stable to find out why a foal disappears every May Eve. A huge hand comes in, and Teyrnnon attacks it before it can take a foal. The hand leaves behind a baby, which Teyrnnon and his wife raise as their son. Eventually word of events at Pwyll's court reaches Teyrnnon's ears. Realizing the boy must be Pwyll's lost son, Teyrnnon returns him to his parents. Rhiannon names the boy Pryderi [anxiety] because her anxiety has been lifted.

### **Branwen Daughter of Llyr**

Matholwch, king of Ireland, sails to Britain to woo Branwen, sister of the giant Bendigeidfran [Bran], king of the Island of the Mighty [Britain]. Bran agrees to the match. During the celebrations, Efnisien, Bran's half-brother, mutilates the Irish horses in anger at not being consulted over the marriage. The offended Irish prepare to leave, but Bran placates them by gifts of new horses and a magic cauldron, which had originally been brought over from Ireland by Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid, a giant of supernatural origin.

Branwen sails to Ireland with Matholwch, and for a while all goes well. She bears a son, whom they name Gwern. But the Irish start to chafe at the memory of the offense to their horses, and they pressure Matholwch to punish Branwen. She is put to work as a scullery maid. A starling takes a message from Branwen to her brothers, and Bran leads an army to release her. The Irish, in fear, try to pacify Bran by building a huge house in his honor. Efnisien inspects the house and discovers and kills the 200 Irish soldiers hidden in flour sacks.

During the peace negotiations, when everything is settled, Efnisien suddenly casts his nephew Gwern into the fire and kills him. Battle breaks out. The Irish are winning because they have the magic cauldron, into which they cast dead soldiers, who come back to life. Seeing this, Efnisien repents of his deeds and hides himself among the dead Irishmen. When he is cast into the cauldron, he uses his great strength to destroy it, but he is killed in the process.

When the battle is over, only seven Welsh survivors remain besides Bran, who is mortally wounded, and Branwen, who dies of a broken heart as soon as she reaches Britain. Following Bran's instructions, the survivors cut off his head and take it to Pembrokeshire, where they remain feasting for 87 years, until one of them remembers their sorrow. They take the head to London and bury it there to protect Britain from invaders.

In Ireland, five pregnant women survive to repopulate the island.

### **Manawydan Son of Llyr**

Two of the survivors from the battle in Ireland are Manawydan, Branwen's brother, and Pryderi, Pwyll's son. Since Manawydan's kingdom has been usurped in his absence, Pryderi invites him to come to Dyfed and marry the widowed Rhiannon. Manawydan accepts the offer. For a time everyone flourishes, but one night every living being and habitation in the kingdom disappears except for Manawydan, Rhiannon, Pryderi, and Pryderi's wife, Cigfa.

For a while the four of them live off the land and stored supplies, but eventually they realize they must make a livelihood for themselves. Manawydan and Pryderi set up shop in Hereford as saddlemakers, but they are so good at their craft that the other craftsmen plot to kill them. Rather than fight, Manawydan persuades Pryderi to move to another town and start a shield-making shop, but once again the other craftsmen plot against them. They try a third town and a third craft—shoemaking—but the same thing occurs, so they give up and go back to Dyfed.

While hunting one day, Manawydan and Pryderi come across a new fort. Against Manawydan's advice, Pryderi investigates and is caught in a spell. When Manawydan returns without Pryderi, Rhiannon searches for her son and also becomes trapped in the spell, and the fort then disappears.

After another brief attempt at shoemaking, Manawydan and Cigfa decide to raise crops. But the night before Manawydan plans to harvest each field, the crop is destroyed. He decides to keep watch on his third field, and in the night hundreds of mice appear and raze the crop. He captures one mouse and decides to hang it as a thief. As he is making a tiny gallows, a clerk appears and tries to ransom the mouse with no success. The clerk is followed by a priest, then a bishop, both of whom try to ransom the mouse. Manawydan finally tells the bishop the only acceptable ransom is the release of Pryderi and Rhiannon and a lifting of the spell on Dyfed. The bishop is really an enchanter bent on avenging Gwawl for the trick played on him in "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed," and the mouse is the enchanter's pregnant wife. The magician agrees to lift his spells, Manawydan releases the mouse, and Pryderi and Rhiannon reappear, along with all the living things in Dyfed.

### **Math Son of Mathonwy**

Math, lord of Gwynedd, has one peculiarity: when he is not at war, his feet have to be held in the lap of a virgin. Gilfaethwy, Math's nephew, becomes sick with desire for Goewin, the footholder. When Gilfaethwy's brother, Gwydion, realizes this, he plots to start a war to get Math out of the castle. He interests Math in obtaining a new kind of animal that Arawn has given to Pryderi—a herd of pigs. Disguised as bards and storytellers, Gwydion and his men call on Pryderi and arrange to exchange the pigs for some horses and hounds. After Gwydion departs with the pigs, the horses and hounds disappear, so Pryderi gathers an army to pursue Gwydion.

Gwydion drags his feet about getting home, so both kingdoms are ready for war by the time he arrives. While Math is at his camp, Gwydion chases Goewin's maidens out of her room, and Gilfaethwy enters and rapes her. The next day Gwydion and his brother join the army.

After several battles, Gwydion challenges Pryderi to single combat and kills him by enchantment. The armies disband and Math returns to his court, where Goewin tells him what his nephews did to her. To punish them, Math turns his nephews into a doe and a stag for a year, during which time they have a fawn by each other. The next year they become

a wild boar and sow and again have a child; and the third year they are wolves and return with a cub. After this great shame, Math releases his nephews from enchantment.

When Math is looking for a new virgin footholder, Gwydion suggests his sister, Aranrhod. To test her virginity, Math asks her to step over his magic wand. When she does, she gives birth to two sons. One makes for the sea and Gwydion hides the other. He brings the boy up in secret, and when he is almost full grown, Gwydion takes him to Aranrhod, who puts a curse on the boy that he shall never have a name unless she gives it to him.

Gwydion disguises himself and the boy as shoemakers and returns to Aranrhod's court. While she is being measured for shoes, she sees the boy shoot a wren and comments on his dexterity. From her comment Gwydion takes a name for the boy: Lleu Llaw Gyffes [fair one with a deft hand]. Realizing she has been tricked, Aranrhod swears the boy will have no arms unless she provides them. Again Gwydion disguises himself and the boy (this time as bards) and conjures up a magical fleet of ships. The threat of war convinces Aranrhod to arm the two supposed bards. Angry at this second trick, she swears that Lleu will never have a wife of earthly birth.

To get around this final curse, Math and Gwydion create a woman made of flowers—Blodeuwedd—to be Lleu's wife. Math gives Lleu some land, and Lleu and Blodeuwedd set up court.

One day while Lleu is away at Math's court, Blodeuwedd meets a passing huntsman, Gronw Bebyr, and the two fall in love. Wanting more than an affair, Blodeuwedd tricks her husband into telling her how he can be killed and conspires with Gronw Bebyr to murder Lleu. When the specially prepared spear strikes him, Lleu turns into an eagle and flies away.

When Gwydion hears the tidings, he searches for Lleu and eventually finds the wounded eagle and turns it back into Lleu. After Lleu's wounds heal, the two go after Blodeuwedd and Gronw Bebyr. Hearing of their coming, Blodeuwedd and her maidens flee, but the maidens are so frightened that they run backwards and fall into a lake and drown. Blodeuwedd herself does not drown, but she is turned into an owl by Gwydion. The punishment for Gronw Bebyr is to allow Lleu to throw a spear at him. Lleu agrees to let Gronw stand behind a boulder, but Lleu throws so hard that the spear pierces the stone and kills Gronw.



**NOTE**

1. For a complete account of the history of this mistake, see Rachel Bromwich, “‘The Mabinogion’ and Lady Charlotte Guest,” in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1986): 127–41.

## *Chapter 1*

# Sidney Lanier and *The Boy's Mabinogion*

Strangely enough, the Mabinogion first entered the realm of children's literature in the United States. *The Boy's Mabinogion*, edited by the American poet Sidney Lanier, appeared in 1881; it was based on Lady Charlotte Guest's English translation of the medieval Red Book of Hergest—the three-volume edition published in 1849. Some scholars believe that Lady Charlotte's translation was the first children's version, but they seem to be ignoring her own intentions for the work.<sup>1</sup> She certainly did dedicate the results of her scholarship to her sons, who were still in the nursery, but her hope was that they would enjoy the tales as adults.<sup>2</sup> The extensive scholarly apparatus she attached to the translation should be evidence enough to counter the suggestion that she intended the work for children. If authorial intentions carry any weight at all, Lanier's book was the first version of the Mabinogion produced specifically for a youthful readership.

*The Boy's Mabinogion* was the third volume in a series called The Boy's Library of Legend and Chivalry, all edited by Lanier and published by Charles Scribner's Sons. The complete series was to have comprised *The Boy's Froissart* (1879), *The Boy's King Arthur* (1880), *The Boy's Mabinogion* (1881), *The Boy's Percy* (1882), *The Boy's Monstrelet* (left unfinished at Lanier's death), and *The Boy's Gesta Romanorum* (also left unfinished). As the son of a Southern gentleman, Lanier had imbibed the tales of chivalry in his own youth and was eager to pass them on to a new generation of readers. Like many of his Southern contemporaries, he saw the knightly ideals as a code to live by in the modern world; perhaps the grasping materialism of post-Civil War society made him nostalgic for a simpler and more honorable code of conduct. Indeed, he expressed this view in a letter to Logan E. Bleckley dated November 15, 1874. Trade, claimed Lanier, had overthrown chivalry:

Trade has now had possession of the civilized world for four hundred years; it controls all things, it interprets the Bible, it guides our national & almost all our individual life with its maxims; & its oppressions upon the moral existence of man have come to be ten thousand times more grievous than the worst tyrannies of the Feudal System ever were. Thus in the reversals of time, it is *now* the *gentleman* who must arise & overthrow Trade. That chivalry which every man has, in some degree, in his heart; which does not depend upon birth but which is a revelation from God of justice, of fair dealings, of scorn of mean advantage; which condemns [*sic*] the selling of stock which one *knows* is going to fall, to a man who *believes* it is going to rise, as much as it would condemn any other form of rascality or of injustice, or of meanness;—it is this which must in these latter days organize its insurrections & burn up every one of the cunning moral castles from which Trade sends out its forays upon the conscience of modern Society. (Anderson 153–54)

Lanier's dedication to these ideals was so great that as a teenager he had organized a company of boy archers, resplendent in plumed caps, who drilled regularly and participated in parades on patriotic holidays. His fondness for the ancient chivalric code is also reflected in his liberal use of archaic words and expressions in his correspondence to close friends, a practice that predates the *Froissart* by more than fifteen years.

The Scribner's series of knightly legends was not Lanier's first venture into children's literature. His short story "The Story of a Proverb" appeared in the May 1877 issue of *St. Nicholas*, and at Christmas of that same year, the Baltimore weekly *Every Saturday* published a poem Lanier had written for his own children, "The Hard Times in Elfland." This is the story of a bankrupt and sickly Santa Claus, who, having in-

vested unwisely in a scheme to build a celestial Grand Trunk Railway, now must make his yearly rounds on foot. Aubrey Starke, one of Lanier's biographers, writes of this poem that "nothing could be a more charming substitute for a Christmas gift. It is, in every way, one of the most successful and delightful poems that Lanier ever wrote, and one that all children should enjoy" (290).

The bankrupt situation Lanier was writing about was one with which he was all too familiar. None of his many professions—soldier, novelist, travel writer, flutist, composer, lawyer, literary critic, scholar, poet—had been able to keep him and his family financially secure. Lanier suffered from tuberculosis, developed in the months he spent in a Northern prison during the Civil War, and he was never strong enough to work full time; in fact, he knew full well that he might not have many years to live. Despite assistance from his many friends, money was always tight in the Lanier household. This financial necessity prompted him to approach Scribner's with the idea of publishing a new edition of Froissart's chronicles edited for boys. Much to everyone's surprise, *The Boy's Froissart*, which was published in 1879, was so successful that Scribner's commissioned Lanier to edit a similar volume for each of the following three years (Starke 380).<sup>3</sup>

Having examined the *Froissart*, I am at a loss to explain its popularity. Perhaps Aubrey Starke is correct in attributing the success to "the current taste for the medieval which had affected even juvenile literature" (360). However, a taste for the medieval was not limited to nineteenth-century children's literature; Howard Pyle's medieval romances for children are still in print in America (e.g., *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* [1883] and *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights* [1903]). In fact, the 1996–97 *Books in Print* lists twelve editions of Pyle's *Robin Hood* and eight editions of his *King Arthur*. Whether this profusion indicates young readers' continuing taste for the medieval as mediated by Howard Pyle or publishers' continuing taste for lapsed copyrights is hard to determine. However, if the latter reason is foremost, I would think Lanier's *Boy's King Arthur* would also be available in numerous editions.

These tales of noble medieval heroes seem to have been more popular in America than in Britain, perhaps because America lacked a hereditary aristocracy of its own. To English critics like John Rowe Townsend, the fake archaism in Pyle's books is "uncongenial"; Townsend suggests that Pyle is overrated in the United States (91–92). On the other hand, a reading of Edith Nesbit's turn-of-the-century children's books shows her child characters, invariably middle-class English children, adopting

similar archaic styles in their speech when they are playing games. The popularity of Nesbit's books indicates that they provide an excellent reflection of what Edwardian children were actually reading, so conscious archaism must have enjoyed some popularity in British children's literature. Lanier's editions were published in Britain as well as in the United States, indicating at least a small British market for knightly legends. Since Lanier and Pyle went into more American editions than British ones, however, there is still an argument for the view that the taste for medievalism was stronger in America than in Britain.

Medievalism may have had little to do with the success of *The Boy's Froissart*. In *The Rise of Children's Book Reviewing in America*, Richard Darling explains that in the post-Civil War era there was a "vigorous attempt" to bring out simplified classics of world literature for children (41). Lanier's boys' editions were part of this new tradition and found a generally favorable reception among those who reviewed children's books.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Lanier's *Froissart*, marketing the book in time for the Christmas trade must have helped increase the sales figures. Despite a complaint in the *Atlantic Monthly* review that the book contained perhaps too much Froissart, most of the reviews were favorable, and this first volume of knightly legends went into two additional printings, selling 4,500 copies in its first year (Starke 380). Therefore, Lanier was assured a yearly income as long as he produced new volumes for the series. In 1880 Scribner's published *The Boy's King Arthur*, the only book in the series that has retained any measure of popularity; this volume was an edited version of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. The second volume was as popular as the first, so Lanier had every expectation of success for the series. There were only two more titles to come: *The Boy's Mabinogion* in 1881 and *The Boy's Percy* in 1882. For each of the four published volumes, Lanier earned the princely sum of \$350 (Anderson 196, 200).

The *Mabinogion* and the *Percy* were, in fact, posthumous publications; the tuberculosis finally caught up with Lanier on 7 September 1881. When he died, he left unfinished *The Boy's Monstrelet* and *The Boy's Gesta Romanorum*, neither of which was ever published. Scribner's had no reason to commission a new editor for these incomplete volumes: sales had fallen off for the entire series, and the two most recently published volumes were not performing well in the marketplace. By 1900, however, the *Froissart* had sold 13,000 copies, the *King Arthur* 12,900, the *Mabinogion* 5,500, and the *Percy* 3,800 (Starke 380). These numbers were respectable enough to encourage Scribner's to reprint the

entire series in 1908–9, replacing the elaborate, individualized green-and-gold covers with a red cover (based on the design of the *Percy's* original binding), and labeling the spines with the name of the series: *The Boy's Library of Legend and Chivalry*. By this time the volumes had been through several individual reprintings. When reprinting the *Mabinogion* in 1884, Scribner's had made one major alteration: the title of the book became *Knightly Legends of Wales: Or, The Boy's Mabinogion*. Perhaps the publishers found the title "Mabinogion" unfamiliar to their readers, or they may have wished to follow Lanier's lead in emphasizing the Arthurian tales attached to the Mabinogi proper.

The changes were unfortunate ones as far as the Mabinogi itself was concerned. The new title was misleading; so was the new cover. The original binding was based on Welsh designs that were very appropriate to the Mabinogi—ravens, harps, leeks—whereas the new binding gave the impression that the contents were mostly tales of King Arthur's knights. This was not the first time *The Boy's Mabinogion* had suffered such an indignity: the cover of the British edition published in 1881 by Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington had featured a knight on horseback surrounded by various knightly accoutrements.

Although the series itself did not remain popular enough to justify any further reprintings, individual titles occasionally resurfaced during the twentieth century. In 1976 Roth Publishing reprinted the 1884 edition of *Knightly Legends of Wales: Or, the Boy's Mabinogion* as part of its Children's Literature Reprint Series. *The Boy's King Arthur* has seldom been out of print—a circumstance attributable more to the popularity of Malory and King Arthur than to Lanier's editorial skills. No doubt the N. C. Wyeth illustrations which were added to a later edition of the *King Arthur* also contributed to its lasting popularity. As recently as 1989 *The Boy's King Arthur*, complete with Wyeth illustrations, was reissued as part of Macmillan's Illustrated Classics Series. (This edition is still listed as available in the 1996–97 *Books in Print*.)

Lanier's childhood taste for Froissart and Malory prepared him to edit the first two volumes of the series, but he had no background whatsoever in Welsh or Welsh legends. He knew Matthew Arnold's views on the Celtic contribution to English literature, and he clearly had pored over Lady Charlotte Guest's voluminous footnotes and appendices, but his unfamiliarity with the material is apparent throughout his introduction and in his editorial practices. He was, in effect, twice removed from the original source, the Red Book of Hergest. Lady Charlotte Guest herself acknowledged that she approached the Welsh legends as an outsider:

It may be considered rash in one who has but recently become acquainted with the Principality and its literature, to engage in a work like the present, while there are so many others, by whom it would be much more ably executed. (1: viii)

An American reinterpreting an Englishwoman's translation of a medieval Welsh text is bound to run into difficulties and cultural misunderstandings. When the American is a Southern gentleman writing for an audience of children, the problems multiply: a Southern gentleman believed (even more devoutly than other Victorians) that children, like women, should be protected from the seamier aspects of life. Many of those seamier aspects are well represented in medieval romance.

A close examination of *The Boy's Mabinogion* shows Lanier to have been a scrupulous editor. He retained for the most part his source's exact words, changing only minor punctuation marks, paragraphing, and British spellings. However, he did not retain *all* of his source's words; he excised everything that might offend moral sensibilities. As a result, the tales are even more ambiguous and obscure than their originals.

Lanier seems to have had little understanding of the Welsh material and even less sympathy for it. He uses loaded adjectives to describe the stories: "grotesque," "hideous," "uncouth." He makes careless mistakes in his introduction and his editing; for example, he says that Blodeuwedd, the woman made of flowers, was created to be a bride for Gwydion (*Boy's Mabinogion* xvi), whereas she was in fact intended for Lleu Llaw Gyffes, Gwydion's nephew/son.<sup>5</sup> Lanier's arrangement of the contents also indicates a lack of understanding—he apparently did not realize that the Four Branches were linked stories. Guest kept them together and included the formulaic ending "And thus ends this portion of the Mabinogi," but Lanier splits them up and omits the formula.

A comparison of Guest's table of contents to Lanier's may be useful here. The column on the left lists the contents of Guest's three-volume translation; the column on the right shows how Lanier rearranged the stories to suit himself. (Of course, Guest's arrangement was itself somewhat idiosyncratic.)

### **Guest**

The Lady of the Fountain  
Peredur the Son of Evrawc  
Geraint the Son of Erbin  
Kilhwch and Olwen  
The Dream of Rhonabwy  
\*Pwyll Prince of Dyved

### **Lanier**

The Lady of the Fountain  
Kilhwch and Olwen  
Peredur the son of Evrawc  
The Dream of Rhonabwy  
\*Pwyll, Prince of Dyved  
The Story of Lludd and Llevelys

*Branwen the Daughter of Llyr	*The Origin of the Owl
*Manawyddan the Son of Llyr	*Branwen the Daughter of Llyr
*Math the Son of Mathonwy	*Manawyddan and the Mice
The Dream of Maxen Wledig	Geraint the Son of Erbin
The Story of Lludd and Llevelys	The Dream of Maxen Wledig
The History of Taliesin	Taliesin

(Note: an asterisk indicates portions of the Mabinogi.)

The only reason Lanier gives for changing the order of contents is to explain that he has placed “*Kilhwch and Olwen*” after “*The Lady of the Fountain*” in order to show the contrast between the native Welsh tale and the more dainty, French-influenced Arthurian tale (*Boy's Mabinogion* vi). His reasons for doing so are less than complimentary:

In order to bring these two classes [the native tales and those with foreign influences] into striking contrast, and to show how much a foreign admixture of this kind might smooth down the grotesque ruggedness of its Welsh original, I have changed the order of the Mabinogion as given in Lady Guest's arrangement, and have placed the story of *Kilhwch and Olwen*, which is almost hideous in many of its huge fancies and distortions and is pure Welsh, immediately next to the story of *The Lady of the Fountain*, whose daintiness, luxury, black savages, and the like, seem here and there to indicate foreign touches. (v–vi)

For Lanier, the stories that are “pure Welsh” are grotesque, hideous, fanciful, and distorted, whereas the tales that have been adulterated by foreign (specifically French) influences are smooth and dainty. This statement, however, is the only explanation Lanier offers for rearranging any of the contents; he does not explain why he has changed the order of the other stories. Under Lanier's arrangement, “*Pwyll Prince of Dyfed*” (the First Branch) is followed unexpectedly by an unrelated Welsh tale, then a portion of the Fourth Branch (“*The Origin of the Owl*”), all of the Second Branch (“*Branwen the Daughter of Llyr*”), and all of the Third Branch (“*Manawyddan and the Mice*”). There is no indication that the four tales of the Mabinogi are interconnected or meant to follow one another in a specific order.

Lanier's introduction gives little indication of the extent of his expurgations. Having identified his source as Lady Charlotte Guest's 1838 translation of the Red Book of Hergest, he proceeds to give his reasons for choosing to edit this work.<sup>6</sup> In the process, he reveals some of his own prejudices:

The intrinsic charm of the stories themselves in the first place would easily have secured them a position in this series. Though not so rich as the *Arabian Nights*,



they are more vigorous, and their fascination is of a more manful quality. Moreover, they are in comparison open-air tales, and do not move in that close, and, if one could think such a thing, gas-poisoned, temperature which often renders the atmosphere of the Eastern tales extremely unwholesome. (iv)

Although Lanier finds the Welsh tales grotesque and hideous, he does admit that they have a charm of their own. Compared to the French Arthurian tales, they may leave much to be desired, but compared to the stories in *The Arabian Nights*, they are downright wholesome. It is probably not a coincidence that The Boy's Library of Legend and Chivalry did not contain a volume called *The Boy's Arabian Nights*.

Another reason Lanier gives for choosing the Mabinogion is that the stories center on King Arthur's court and therefore make this an excellent companion volume to *The Boy's King Arthur*. In fact, the complete title of the original edition is *The Boy's Mabinogion, Being the Earliest Welsh Tales of King Arthur in the Famous Red Book of Hergest*. Unfortunately this claim reveals Lanier's lack of scholarship. The Arthurian tales included in the Mabinogion are incidental to the Mabinogi proper; accidental propinquity has attached them to the Four Branches. Lanier may be forgiven for his misunderstanding, however, in that his source put a great deal of emphasis on the Arthurian tales; Guest even included numerous French, German, and Scandinavian analogues of the romances. Lanier clearly believed that the stories were mainly Arthurian; in a letter to his brother, Clifford A. Lanier, in 1880, he referred to the Mabinogion as "a collection of Welsh stories about King Arthur" (Anderson 200). The stories were all jumbled together in the Red Book of Hergest, which Guest undertook to translate, but Lanier's edition gives pride of place to the tales of Peredur, Owain, and Geraint rather than to the Mabinogi.

As far as the Four Branches themselves were concerned, Lanier perceived them as exhibiting the worst characteristics of Welsh literature, abounding "in extravagance, in wildness beyond all tolerance of reason, in lawlessness" (vi-vii). In fact, he seems to have no idea how to handle them. Instead of grouping them together as related stories as Lady Charlotte did, he chooses bits and pieces of them and places them in what seems to be an arbitrary order amongst the other tales.

Lanier mentions that he has a final and most important reason for editing the Mabinogion, but he never makes this reason very clear. Presumably he believes that the wildness of the Welsh stories will show more clearly the advantages of Malory's Arthurian tales. As Lanier writes, "nothing can be clearer than the constant presence in the latter of a certain reasonable restraint, a sober proportion, a sense of the supreme

value of law" (x). These are values that Lanier cannot see in his own country, and this, he writes, is his "reason for bringing these Mabinogion before my young countrymen at this particular time" (vi). As this last quote indicates, Lanier, like many Welsh scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, perpetuated Lady Charlotte Guest's error (originally Owen Pughe's error) concerning the word "mabinogion," taking it to refer to all the tales that had been collected into the Red Book. This is no doubt why he omitted the formulaic ending in each of the Four Branches, "And thus ends this branch of the Mabinogi."

After stating his reasons for selecting the Mabinogion for the series, Lanier gives a brief account of the history of Welsh literature, then presents a pronunciation guide for Welsh names. Finally, towards the end of his introduction, he makes a statement about his editorial practices:

The present work contains nearly all the Mabinogion originally given; and, as in the other works of this series, the original text is scrupulously preserved, except occasionally to hasten the long-lagging action of a story,—in which case the interpolation is always placed in brackets,—and except where the demands of modern reserve required excision. (xix)

Lanier might more accurately have said the present work contains *parts* of nearly all the stories, for "modern reserve" seems to have required considerable excision. However, he is correct in claiming that the original text that remains is scrupulously preserved.

Perhaps it is unfair to judge Lanier so harshly. Throughout his work on the boys' series, he was experiencing severe financial and physical hardships. The financial pressure forced him to work despite his illness. As he wrote to his father, "If I had not learned to murmur at nothing, I should be inclined to complain at the cruel fate which keeps me editing other men's works to boil the pot, when my head is so full of books of my own" (Anderson 196). On his deathbed, Lanier was still hard at work on the proofs of the *Mabinogion*, but he only managed to complete his revision of the introduction. The lapses of clarity in the introduction may be due to his illness rather than to shoddy scholarship. His editorial skills no doubt suffered as well.

Whatever the reason for his editorial shortcomings, Lanier's actual practices are clearly revealed in his treatment of the Four Branches.

Lanier presents the First Branch, "Pwyll Prince of Dyved," almost word for word as he found it in Guest's translation. This branch is a fairly straightforward tale with little need for censorship to make it fit for a young audience. Pwyll's adventures in Annwn are presented with no noticeable excisions. Actually, all the necessary expurgations had

already been made by Lady Charlotte Guest. The medieval Welsh text emphasizes Pwyll's honorable conduct while in Annwn: despite appearing in the semblance of Arawn, King of Annwn, Pwyll manfully resists the temptation to make love to Arawn's wife, who is the most beautiful woman ever seen. Arawn himself is surprised when he discovers that Pwyll did not sleep with the queen during the year the two men exchanged places. In fact, Pwyll's conduct in this matter is the basis of a continuing friendship between the two realms that leads to prosperity for Pwyll and contributes indirectly to the death of Pwyll's son, Pryderi, in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi. (A gift from Arawn to Pryderi provides Gwydion's pretext for starting a war with Pryderi.) Guest chose to leave out Pwyll's temptation in her translation, although she provided the unexpurgated Welsh text alongside it, so the story was already sanitized when Lanier began his editing.

Lanier's first difficulty with the text occurs at the marriage feast of Pwyll and Rhiannon. Guest's translation reads "And the time came that they should sleep, and Pwyll and Rhiannon went to their chamber" (3: 58). Lanier omits this line, no doubt thinking that any mention of the wedding night would be suggestive. If he had had a reading knowledge of medieval Welsh, he would have known that Lady Charlotte had already excised the indelicate part: "*athreulaw y nos honno drwy digrifwch a llonydwch a wnaethant*" ("and they spent that night in pleasure and satisfaction" [personal translation]). This is the first instance of Lanier's editing sexual content.

The second expurgation runs along similar lines. For some reason, Lanier is more prudish than the nineteenth-century lady who provided his source; he seems to feel that all references to pregnancy and childbirth should be omitted. (Guest had no problem including such references; as the mother of ten children, pregnancy and childbirth were daily topics of conversation for her.) There is no way to avoid mentioning the birth of Pryderi, the son of Pwyll and Rhiannon, but the details of the birth are glossed over quickly. Lanier omits the first occasion when Pwyll's nobles ask him to put Rhiannon away from him and take a new wife; there is too much talk about childlessness in this section, and nineteenth-century children were not to know or suspect the biological role women played in childbirth. In Guest's translation, Pwyll's nobles are sorrowful because he has no heir:

"Lord," said they, "we know that thou art not so young as some of the men of this country, and we fear that thou mayest not have an heir of the wife whom thou hast taken. Take therefore another wife of whom thou mayest have heirs."  
(3: 60)

Lanier skips this conversation entirely.

The nobles approach Pwyll again after the infant Pryderi disappears under suspicious circumstances:

Then the nobles came to Pwyll, and besought him to put away his wife because of the great crime which she had done. But Pwyll answered them that they had no cause wherefore they might ask him to put away his wife. (*Boy's Mabinogion* 189)

On this occasion Lanier has dropped the final clause of the sentence: "save for her having no children" (Guest 3: 62). And as Pwyll points out to his nobles in Guest's account, "But children has she now had, therefore will I not put her away, if she has done wrong, let her do penance for it" (3: 62).

Birth in general seems to be a forbidden subject. Lanier excises all references he possibly can—in fact, a number that are vital to the plots of the Four Branches—so that children, colts, and other newborn creatures appear in the stories as if by spontaneous generation, often without any acknowledged parentage. In the First Branch, Teyrnnon's horse is allowed to retain her fame as a brood mare, but she is not permitted to give birth on the printed page. Likewise, when Teyrnnon brings the foundling Pryderi to his wife, Lanier does not allow the woman her little joke:

"My lord," she said, "if thou wilt, I shall have great diversion and mirth. I will call my women unto me, and tell them that I have been pregnant." "I will readily grant thee to do this," he answered. (Guest 3: 65)

This section is omitted in *The Boy's Mabinogion*.

Besides sex and childbirth, the only other major area of expurgation Lanier undertook was that of the graphically unpleasant, whether it involved taboo subjects or simply unpleasant description. For example, Rhiannon's waiting women are let off rather lightly in Lanier's edition. He glosses over their plan to place the blame for the baby's disappearance on Rhiannon by smearing her mouth and hands with blood, thus suggesting that she killed and ate her own newborn child. Naturally enough for a man of his moral outlook, Lanier omits the suggestion of cannibalism; he also cuts most of the discussion of the conspiracy. Two pages of plotting are boiled down to one sentence: "And the women were frightened; and, having plotted together, they accused Rhiannon of having murdered her child before their eyes" (189). However, Lanier misses a line in his expurgations. Later in the tale, when Rhiannon is

acting out her penance, she tells Teyrnon, "this is my penance for slaying my own son, and devouring him" (194). Consistency would have required Lanier to omit this sentence too.

There is one omission in Lanier's First Branch that creates slight confusion. In the Welsh original, Rhiannon gives Pryderi his name because his reappearance has lifted her anxiety. Guest adds a note to her English translation explaining that in Welsh "pryderi" means "anxiety." Lanier drops the note, and Pendaran Dyfed's comment about the name suiting its recipient becomes meaningless to the reader. Despite such lapses, however, the majority of the tale is kept intact and is understandable.

The same cannot be said for "Math Son of Mathonwy," the Fourth Branch, which appears after "Lludd and Llefelys" in Lanier's volume. First of all, Lanier excises the first two-thirds of the story, which is a tale of murder, rape, and punishment. Lady Charlotte Guest's own modern reserve (or possibly that of her publisher) had led her to soften the circumstances of the rape and obscure the details of the punishment, so her Victorian version of the tale required little further editing. What is amazing about her translation is the amount of sexually explicit and suggestive material that she retained. Nevertheless, Lanier either felt the first part of "Math" to be unsuitable or felt himself to be inadequate to the task of editing it for children, for he omits the rape (in Lady Charlotte's account, a forced marriage) of Goewin, the death of Pryderi, and the punishment of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, and begins the story with the discovery of Lleu Llaw Gyffes, omitting the questionable circumstances of his birth. According to Lanier's version of the event, "Once upon a time Gwydion found a yellow-haired child in his chamber, which had been placed there by magic art. And Gwydion straightway flung a velvet scarf over the child and hid it" (206). The magic art in question involved Aranrhod giving birth unexpectedly when Math was magically testing her virginity, obviously an unsuitable event to a children's editor. Lanier also omits the existence of Lleu's twin brother without removing mention of his actions. As a result, Lleu takes on his twin's actions as well as his own, and thus seems to swim out to sea at the same time that he is hidden away in a trunk.

Starting at this point in the story creates a great deal of confusion, not only because of Lanier's carelessness in recounting Lleu's birth, but also because none of the characters receives a proper introduction. The reader has no idea of the relationship between Math and Gwydion, Aranrhod and Lleu, Gwydion and Aranrhod. There is no mention that Math is the king and that both he and Gwydion are noted magicians. All the

characters appear quite suddenly, and their actions seem entirely without motivation.

In the original tale, the magician Gwydion has an ambiguous relationship to Lleu. Pronoun references indicate that Gwydion may be Lleu's father as well as his uncle. Naturally enough, Lanier does not allow any suggestion of incest to remain; he hides the identity of Lleu's mother, Aranrhod, and in the process obscures her motivation for interfering in Lleu's life. An important conversation between Gwydion and Aranrhod begins too abruptly in Lanier's account:

"Heaven prosper thee," said he.  
 "What is the name of the boy?" said she. (207)

Lanier has omitted several lines of the conversation between Gwydion's greeting and Aranrhod's question. The missing lines explain the motivation for the next third of the tale, as is obvious in Guest's translation:

"Who is the boy that followeth thee?" she asked. "This youth, he is thy son," he answered. "Alas," said she, "what has come unto thee that thou shouldest shame me thus, wherefore dost thou seek my dishonour, and retain it so long as this?" (3: 233)

Gwydion points out that a fine son (legitimate or not) is no dishonor, but when Aranrhod proceeds to lay a curse on the boy anyway, he taunts her, "As for thee, that which afflicts thee is that thou art no longer called a damsel" (3: 233). "Damsel" and "maiden" are Guest's euphemisms for "virgin," as Lanier seems to have understood. Needless to say, none of this slipped past Lanier's editorial eye.

Just as he did in the naming of Pryderi, Lanier now omits the note that explains the name Lleu Llaw Gyffes to a non-Welsh reader. When the boy shoots a wren (presumably with a slingshot), Aranrhod says "Verily . . . with a steady hand did the lion aim at it" (*Boy's Mabinogion* 209). Gwydion derives the boy's name from this statement, as is clear when Guest explains that "Lleu Llaw Gyffes" means "lion with a steady hand." Lanier leaves the reader wondering where the name comes from and what it has to do with Aranrhod's comment.

After Aranrhod has put a curse on Lleu so that he cannot marry a mortal woman, Gwydion and Math conjure up a woman out of flowers. This is Blodeuwedd, whose story is masterfully told in Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*. Unfortunately, Lanier does her less than justice. From this point on, the plot of the Fourth Branch revolves around Blodeuwedd's adultery with Gronw Bebyr—or, at least, that is the intent of the

original. Guest's Welsh text (which she obligingly provided with her translation) is very clear on this point: "*ar nos honno kyscu ygyt awnaethant*" (3: 208), which translates literally as "that night they slept together." Apparently Guest was not comfortable with such bluntness; her translation reads, "And that evening passed they in each other's company" (3: 241). Lanier avoids the subject altogether, unwilling even to allow Blodeuwedd and Gronw Pebyr to fall in love with each other. He contents himself with an editorial insertion: "Now Blodeuwedd, in spite of her descent from the flowers, was at heart a wicked woman, and so she began to plot with Gronw Pebyr [*sic*] how they might slay the valiant Llew Llaw Gyffes, and enjoy his possessions" (214).

Lanier's sensitivities also lead him to excise the graphic description of the wounded Llew, perched in a tree in the form of an eagle and dripping putrid flesh and vermin, which is eaten by a sow beneath the tree. However, this omission is not as vital to the plot of the story as most of the others are. By removing characters without removing their actions and by obscuring motivations and basic plot elements, Lanier has in effect edited all the sense out of the story. In leaving out the first two-thirds of the tale, he has impoverished the entire Mabinogi, for these first two sections contain the account of the death of Pryderi, a continuing character in all four branches.

Modern Welsh scholars might make further complaints about Lanier's editing practices. J. K. Bollard stresses the tight interlace structure of the Four Branches: "The events of one episode are made clear by comparison with other similar but different episodes" (69-70). Similarly, Jeffrey Gantz believes these tales contain "a highly structured matrix of thematic parallels" (Gantz, *Mabinogion* 28). By omitting part of the story, Lanier has broken this interlaced structure. And, of course, moving this concluding part of the Fourth Branch to a position ahead of the Second and Third Branches damages the structure further.

The Second Branch is entitled "Branwen the Daughter of Llyr." Lanier can be forgiven for not realizing its connection to the story of Pwyll, since the only obvious links are the presence of Pryderi, Pwyll's son, as one of the seven Welsh survivors at the end of the tale and the formulaic ending "And thus ends this portion of the Mabinogi." The material in "Branwen" is not as difficult for a morally inclined editor as that in the Fourth Branch, but the morally sensitive material (by Lanier's standards) that *is* present highlights the inconsistencies in Lanier's editorial choices.

When Matholwch, King of Ireland, arrives at Harlech to seek Branwen, sister of King Bran, as his wife, she and her royal brothers gladly

consent to the match. There is a wedding feast, and that night, as the Welsh source bluntly states, "Matholwch and Branwen slept together" (*"Ar nos honno y kyscwys matholwch abranwnwen ygyt"* [Guest 3: 84]). Guest softens this in her translation: "and that night Branwen became Matholwch's bride" (3: 106). Lanier inexplicably retains Guest's sentence in his edition. Since he is scrupulous elsewhere about excising any suggestion of sex, he must not have realized this sentence has suggestive possibilities. Lacking knowledge of the original Welsh text and of Welsh cultural history, Lanier may have assumed the sentence referred to the wedding ceremony rather than to the wedding night.

More predictably, Lanier omits all references to Branwen's later pregnancy and the birth of a son, Gwern. This omission results in confusion for the reader when Matholwch gives the kingship of Ireland to Gwern—the latter's first appearance in Lanier's edition. With no knowledge of Gwern's parentage, a reader cannot fail to be mystified by the bloody war that erupts between the Welsh and the Irish when Gwern is senselessly murdered by his half-uncle, Efnisien.

Similarly, Lanier neglects to mention several other pregnancies. Lla-sar Llaes Gyfnawid, the original owner of the cauldron of rebirth, is traveling, he tells Matholwch, because "At the end of a month and a fortnight this woman [his wife] will have a son; and the child that will be born at the end of the month and the fortnight will be a warrior fully armed" (Guest 3: 112). No such child exists in Lanier's edition. He also ignores the only Irish survivors of the war:

In Ireland none were left alive, except five pregnant women in a cave in the Irish wilderness; and to these five women in the same night were born five sons, whom they nursed until they became grown up youths. And they thought about wives, and they at the same time desired to possess them, and each took a wife of the mother of their companions, and they governed the country and peopled it. (Guest 3: 128)

The original Welsh text is not as clear-cut on the issues of marriage and monogamy, but even Guest's morally improved version was more than Lanier could handle: sex and childbirth in the same paragraph. He ends the tale before this addendum, leaving the reader to assume that the Irish suffered complete genocide.

As the previous analysis indicates, Lanier's expurgations fall into two general categories: the sexually explicit or implicit (including childbirth) and the graphically violent or disturbing. Just as he omitted the accusation of cannibalism in the First Branch and the "putrid flesh and vermin" which dripped from the wounded eagle in the Fourth Branch, Lanier



now softens the graphic description of Efnisien's treatment of each of two hundred Irishmen hidden in flour sacks. In Guest's translation, Efnisien "squeezed the head until he felt his fingers meet together in the brain through the bone" (3: 121). In Lanier's slightly abridged account, Efnisien "squeezed the head until he killed the man" (237). Again, there is inconsistency in Lanier's excisions for graphic violence; although disturbed by the image of Efnisien's fingers meeting through the bone, Lanier seems unmoved by the graphic description of Efnisien mutilating Matholwch's horses earlier in the story:

And thereupon he rushed under the horses, and cut off their lips at the teeth, and their ears close to their heads, and their tails close to their backs, and wherever he could clutch their eyelids, he cut them to the very bone, and he disfigured the horses, and rendered them useless. (*Boy's Mabinogion* 226)

These are Lady Charlotte's exact words—a close translation of the original Welsh—and surely as disturbing an image of violence as the killing of the Irishmen. In fact, the mutilation of the horses is more disturbing in context, for it is a vicious and excessive revenge for an imagined slight, whereas the Irishmen hidden in the flour sacks are part of a planned ambush against Efnisien's people and therefore a legitimate target for his wrath. Horses were sacrosanct amongst the Celtic peoples, and this mutilation would have been the most abhorrent of insults. Indeed, this event precipitates all the other disasters that follow. Lanier could not omit the mutilation without destroying the plot structure of the tale, not that such a consideration stopped him in other situations, but he might easily have softened the description as he did elsewhere.

Revising the Third Branch of the Mabinogi, "Manawydan Son of Llyr," is another straightforward task for a bowdlerizing editor: there is little sex, explicit or otherwise, and no graphic violence. The tale unfolds naturally from the Second Branch. Pryderi and Manawydan, two of the seven Welsh survivors of the war in "Branwen," return to Pryderi's lands. This is the same Pryderi who was born to Pwyll and Rhiannon in the First Branch, and Manawydan is Branwen's brother. Because Manawydan has no lands of his own, he is interested in Pryderi's offer to let him marry Rhiannon, now widowed, and share the lordship of Dyfed. Luckily, Rhiannon finds Manawydan attractive and agrees to the offer. Lanier retains Guest's statement that Rhiannon became Manawydan's bride; he would not have been aware of the Welsh directness of the Red Book of Hergest, which once again says that they slept together. In fact, every time Guest uses the phrase "became the bride of" she is avoiding the literal translation "slept together."

Most of the Third Branch remains as Lanier found it—the marriage of Manawydan and Rhiannon, the magical disappearance of the entire population of Dyfed, and the protagonists' peripatetic years as successful craftsmen. There are few items of questionable morality. In the medieval text, when Pryderi and Rhiannon disappear, Cigfa, Pryderi's wife, is afraid that Manawydan will take sexual advantage of her now that they are the only two people left in Dyfed. Manawydan calms her fears, saying, "I declare to thee that were I in the dawn of youth I would keep my faith unto Pryderi, and unto thee also will I keep it" (Guest 3: 173). Lanier, as usual, excises this sentence. However, he retains Cigfa's expression of fear for her future, apparently not realizing the nature of her fears. The connotations in this section are subtle in any translation, so Lanier's lack of understanding is excusable. Still, he must have picked up the connotations in Manawydan's reply, or he would have had no reason to omit it.

The other main expurgation in the Third Branch is related to pregnancy, perhaps more of a taboo subject to Lanier than sex itself. Manawydan captures one of the mice that have been destroying his fields and prepares to hang it on a tiny gallows he has constructed for the purpose. The mouse turns out to be the enchanted wife of the magician who has cast a spell over Dyfed. When the magician barter for his wife's freedom, he tells Manawydan, "Now she is pregnant. And had she not been pregnant thou wouldst not have been able to overtake her" (Guest 3: 182). Lanier does not allow pregnant mice in his editions, any more than pregnant horses or pregnant women. The reader is not told why this one mouse was slower than the others, but it is such a minor point that it probably never occurs to most readers to wonder about the lack of explanation.

In the Second and Third Branches ("Branwen" and "Manawydan"), Lanier makes one other kind of editorial alteration: he changes some of Guest's place names. Where she has written "Wales," he writes "Cambria," and "England" becomes "Lloegyr." This is probably an attempt to further mythicize the stories so that they are not attached to any modern place names, at least as far as English-speaking readers are concerned. (The situation is different for Welsh readers.) "Cambria" is a Latinized version of the Welsh "Cymry"—their own name for their country—and "Lloegyr" is a poorly spelled version of the Welsh name for England. Since the latter term had been popularized in the Arthurian romances Lanier loved to read, it is much more likely that he gleaned it from these other sources than that he picked it out from Guest's Welsh text of the Red Book.

Lanier's editorial practices identified most of the cruces of the Mabinogi as far as its future as children's literature was concerned. Other editors and authors had to face the same difficulties in their retellings and decide how they would deal with the adult motivations (particularly the sexual ones) of the characters in a way that was comprehensible to a young audience or, as was most common, how they would censor those situations that they deemed unsuitable for children. Those who chose censorship had to face the additional challenge of maintaining a unified story line despite the absence of crucial motivational factors. Even with these difficulties, few of those who followed in Lanier's footsteps ever managed to edit out the sense of the stories as thoroughly as he did. On the other hand, none of the editors after Lanier were as scrupulous about maintaining the integrity of their source's wording. Considering the personal and moral boundaries that limited Lanier, his work is an honorable tribute to Lady Charlotte Guest and a fitting companion volume to the previous titles in *The Boy's Library of Legend and Chivalry*.

## NOTES

1. In the original, pre-Everyman publication of their translation of the Mabinogion, Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones claim that Lady Charlotte Guest wrote her work for children—an intention that had debilitating results: "Lady Guest was very properly at pains to remove from her versions all that would be out of place when read aloud by a Victorian mother to her young sons. . . . Obviously, Lady Guest's expurgations do more than emasculate Pwyll and Math—they destroy their significance" (*Golden Cockerel Mabinogion* 6).

2. This is the dedication Lady Charlotte Guest wrote for the first volume of her work in 1838:

To Ivor and Merthyr.

My dear Children,

Infants as you yet are, I feel that I cannot dedicate more fitly than to you these venerable relics of ancient lore, and I do so in the hope of inciting you to cultivate the Literature of "Gwylt Walia," in whose beautiful language you are being initiated, and amongst whose free mountains you were born.

May you become early imbued with the chivalric and exalted sense of honour, and the fervent patriotism for which its sons have ever been celebrated.

May you learn to emulate the noble qualities of Ivor Hael, and the firm attachment to your Native Country, which distinguished that Ivor Bach, after whom the elder of you was named.

3. This was a commission Lanier actively pursued. A letter to his father, Robert S. Lanier, dated 6 May 1879, indicates that Lanier began editing Malory before the Froissart had been published: "I have been going, night and day, at an

Edition, for boys, of Sir Thomas Malory's History of King Arthur. . . . I sent off my Froissart book about three weeks ago, and drove hard at this one in the hope of selling it to the same publishers as a companion-work. It went forward yesterday, and I await its fortune with interest" (Anderson 196). Another letter from Lanier to his father ten days later announces that Scribner's has accepted both books for the total sum of \$700 (Anderson 196). Scribner's would have had no idea at that time that the Froissart would become popular, but the resulting sales figures no doubt influenced the publisher's favorable decision when Lanier suggested a continuation of the series.

4. See Darling for a discussion of American reviews of *The Boy's Froissart*, *The Boy's King Arthur*, and *The Boy's Mabinogion*.

5. All citations from *The Boy's Mabinogion* are taken from the 1881 British edition published by Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, which, except for its binding, is identical to the original American edition of the same year.

6. Lanier is in error concerning the date of publication of Guest's work. Although the first volume came out in 1838, the complete translation was not available in America until 1849.

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## *Chapter 2*

# Retellings of the Mabinogi, 1896–1988

Except for Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion, Welsh traditional literature—myth, legend, and folktale—was slow in finding its way to an English-speaking audience. The nationalistic fervor with which other countries pursued their folk literature in the nineteenth century was almost entirely absent in Wales. Although the Celtic nations were unsurpassed at storytelling in the Middle Ages, by the late eighteenth century increased anglicization in Wales had led to a decline in Welsh as a scholarly and literary language and to a disregard for Welsh culture and tradition.<sup>1</sup> A few folklore enthusiasts collected Welsh folktales during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but names such as Edward Lhuyd and Iolo Morganwg are little known outside of Wales. In the case of Morganwg, much of his folklore is of suspect origin, as he often invented his “traditional” materials.

By the end of the nineteenth century, some Welsh folktales and fairy tales were beginning to find their way into English-language anthologies. The interest was primarily antiquarian and somewhat tardy compared to the strong folklore movements in England, Ireland, and Scotland in the nineteenth century. There are altogether only three Welsh stories among the twenty-six tales that comprise Joseph Jacobs's *Celtic Fairy Tales* (1892) and *More Celtic Fairy Tales* (1894); one of them is a simplified version of "Culhwch and Olwen," but the Four Branches do not appear in the collection. Of course, the Welsh had no great collector of tales to popularize their heritage, whereas the Scots had Andrew Lang, the Irish had Lady Wilde, and the English had Jacobs. Lady Charlotte Guest was the most prominent person to bring Welsh materials to the attention of the English-speaking world, and she was more interested in medieval romances than in folktales.

One of the earliest Welsh folktale collections in English is James Motley's *Tales of the Cymry* (1848), intended for a specialized audience of folklorists. Not much was available in English until 1894, when David Nutt published P. H. Emerson's *Tales from Welsh Wales, Founded on Fact and Current Tradition*, along with a related children's volume by the same author, *Welsh Fairy Tales and Other Stories*. Nutt was a well-known name among folklorists and published many volumes of fairy tales for children, including Jacobs's English and Celtic stories and Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. Another scholarly collection appeared in 1896: *Welsh Folk-Lore: A Collection of the Folk-Tales and Legends of North Wales* by the Reverend Elias Owen. By this time folklore was gaining respectability in Wales. Not only was this volume written by a man of the cloth, but it was based on the winning essay of the 1887 National Eisteddfod, the preeminent literary competition in Wales.

The turn of the century saw a change in fortune for Welsh traditional tales. In 1907 T. Fisher Unwin (London) published *The Welsh Fairy Book*, written by W. Jenkyn Thomas and illustrated by Willy Pogany—a name familiar to those who study the history of book illustration. This attractive book was reprinted in 1908 and 1912, indicating a continued marketability. Unwin did not scrimp on the volume. The frontispiece is in full color, and the Pogany illustrations (one hundred in all) are printed in black, white, and red. The placement of the illustrations has been carefully designed to make them an indivisible part of the text; often the text physically overlaps a minor part of the illustration, providing a shadowy pictorial background for the words on the page. This style of book design—the arrangement of text and illustration, the colors used,

the jacket design—was popular at the time; in fact, *The Welsh Fairy Book* bears a striking resemblance to the first edition of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, published in 1900.

Many other collections appeared in the early part of the twentieth century. Examples include Marie Trevelyan's *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales* (1909) and Dora E. Yates's edition of *Welsh Gypsy Folk-Tales* (1933). The interest in English-language collections of Welsh folktales continued to mount throughout the twentieth century. When Sally Roberts Jones compiled her selective bibliography of Anglo-Welsh children's books, *Tales for the Dragon*, in 1984, she was able to list eleven collections of Welsh folktales and legends that were currently available through bookstores and libraries. Although few of these nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections made reference to the Mabinogi or included any selections from it, the growing interest in Welsh traditional material affected the Mabinogi's future as a focus of interest beyond the borders of the Welsh language.

If one were to judge solely by title, the Mabinogi seems to have a strong presence in children's literature in the first two decades of the twentieth century. As usual, however, appearances are deceptive. The popularity of Lady Charlotte Guest's translation had stamped the name "Mabinogion" so indelibly onto this group of eleven Welsh legends that generations of scholars have been unable to erase the error. For many years following Sidney Lanier's *Boy's Mabinogion*, editors and writers continued to perpetuate this linguistic mistake. In the early decades of the twentieth century the word "mabinogion" appeared in numerous children's collections:

Williams, Meta E., ed. *Tales from the Mabinogion*. The Children's Library. London: Fisher Unwin, 1907.

*The Story of Kilhwch and Olwen, Retold from the Mabinogion*. Cardiff: Educational Publishing, 1910.

*The Lady of the Fountain, and Other Tales from the Mabinogion*. Stories Old and New. London: Blackie, 1911.

Buxton, Ethel M. Wilmot. *Kilhugh and Olwen, and Other Stories from the "Mabinogion."* The World's Romances. London: Nelson, 1913.

Clay, Beatrice. *Stories from Le Morte d'Arthur and the Mabinogion*. King's Treasures of Literature. London: Dent, 1921.

*Welsh Legends Adapted from the Mabinogion*. New World School Series. London: Collins, 1924.

Despite their titles, none of the above books contained any part of the Mabinogi; instead they retold some of the Arthurian stories. As well as



perpetuating Owen Pughe's mistaken use of "mabinogion," all of them also perpetuated Lanier's error in assuming that the Mabinogion was a collection of Arthurian stories. Invariably the writers of these volumes drew upon Guest's translation as their source; some of them acknowledged her in their introductions. Her work had done the inestimable service of making the Mabinogion accessible to English readers for the first time, and despite the spurious scholarly attacks that dogged her three-volume translation from its initial publication, it popularized the Welsh tales so successfully that numerous reprints and editions were published. There were three different editions of her work in 1902 alone, so it was readily available to series editors and compilers of anthologies.

Most of the above titles were cheap series books. At the end of the nineteenth century when Scribner's produced *The Boy's Library of Legend and Chivalry*, edited by Sidney Lanier, children's series were just beginning to become popular. In the decades following, publishers became more aware of the market potential for inexpensive collections of tales running to several volumes, and series books soon flourished in both Britain and America. The series publishers who adapted the Welsh material capitalized on both the accessibility and popularity of Guest's magnum opus as well as on the continuing popularity of King Arthur, but they kept their costs low by using cheap paper and bindings and anonymous editors (and occasionally anonymous authors and illustrators as well). Illustrations were sparse and usually unsigned; however, the Blackie and Son collection, *The Lady of the Fountain, and Other Tales from the Mabinogion*, is illustrated by H. R. Millar, who had already become well-known as the illustrator of E. Nesbit's popular Edwardian children's books. Surprisingly, Blackie and Son did not capitalize on Millar's name: it does not appear on the binding or the title page, only as his usual signature on the drawings themselves.

Both the folktales and the legends of Wales continued to reappear in Welsh throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first Welsh version of the Mabinogi intended for children seems to have been J. M. Edwards's edition of the Red Book of Hergest, published by Hughes and Son, an active publisher of Welsh children's books, in 1896. Edwards was a Welsh schoolteacher who wanted to make the legends available to his students in their native tongue—in a morally sanitized form. As he says about the Four Branches in his Foreword, "*Maent yn ddyddorol ryfeddol i blant; ac ynddynt gall y bachgen a'r eneth feddylgar astudio meddwl eu gwlad pan oedd eto heb deimlo dim oddi-wrth yr Iesu*" (iii); "They are wonderfully interesting to children; and in them the

thoughtful boy and girl can study their country's cast of mind when it was still without a sense of Christ" (personal translation). Edwards falls somewhere between Guest and Lanier in his editorial scrupulousness. Since he was a Welsh speaker, he knew better than to omit all the motivation based on sexual relations between characters, but like Guest, he turns the rape of Goewin into a forced marriage and neglects to mention Pwyll's passing up the opportunity to sleep with Arawn's queen. Going one step beyond Guest, he edits the magical virginity test that brings forth Aranrhod's two illegitimate sons; in this edition Aranrhod cannot be Math's virgin footholder because she is married and has two sons. The image of Aranrhod as a staid matron is startling to anyone familiar with the vengeful and guilt-ridden harpy of the original.

Edwards was interested in the educational value of the Mabinogi. Many of the Welsh writers who followed him also used the stories as an educational tool. A perusal of *Bibliotheca Celtica*, the annual Welsh bibliography, shows that Welsh and English versions of the Mabinogi were continually appearing as school readers in Britain during the twentieth century. For example, Ellen Evans retold the Mabinogi in Welsh in four slim readers published by the Educational Publishing Company in 1924. These are undistinguished and sparsely illustrated paperbacks intended for early readers. Another example is the Oxford University Press reader, *Pryderi Fab Pwyll: A First Welsh Reader* (1914). Written by John Young Evans of Aberystwyth, this is a much simplified (both linguistically and morally) version of the tales. More than a decade before W. J. Gruffydd's influential *Math vab Mathonwy* proposed the theory that the Mabinogi in its original oral form had recounted the life story of Pryderi, Evans presented the tales as the history of Pryderi. This enabled him to jettison the most difficult portions of the Fourth Branch, as Pryderi dies before the incest and adultery begin. The rape that indirectly leads to Pryderi's death is transformed into a one-sided love affair in which Goewin steadfastly refuses to marry Gilfaethwy (her rapist in the original text). In the Third Branch, the pregnant mouse becomes a sick mouse. For all Lanier's faults, at least he did not equate pregnancy with illness.

American school textbooks, naturally enough, did not include Welsh legends, so the Mabinogi did not receive much exposure on this side of the Atlantic except for reprints of Lanier's *Boy's Mabinogion*. In 1924, however, Padraic Colum, an Irish storyteller who had emigrated to the United States, retold most of the stories in the Mabinogion in a children's book entitled *The Island of the Mighty*. Based on Guest's trans-

lation, this partial retelling uses the Arthurian tales as a frame story and the older native Welsh tales as inserted stories.

Colum does not include all Four Branches of the Mabinogi in his inserts; only "Pwyll" and "Branwen" are set into the frame story as tales to entertain King Arthur and his court. These revisions were done, according to Colum, "in order to make certain incidents clear and to get rid of passages that are obscure or repetitious" (xvii). Although he does not claim to base his choice of excisions on moral grounds, a few of his alterations indicate a measure of discomfort with the stories as he found them. For example, whereas the medieval text (and Guest's translation) relates that Rhiannon's waiting women conspire to frame her for her baby's disappearance by smearing her face and hands with blood, Colum removes any suggestion of cannibalism by having the women merely spread the blood *near* Rhiannon and accuse her of throwing the baby to wolves conveniently stationed outside the door. Like Lanier, Colum softens the description of Efnisien's treatment of the Irishmen hidden in sacks: "He squeezed the head until the man was dead" (75). There is no mention of brains and bones. Colum also lightens Branwen's punishment; instead of being reduced to a scullery maid who is beaten regularly by the cook, she is merely forced to be the cook. On the other hand, Colum retains the mutilation of the horses as he found it in Guest's translation. This mutilation was an unspeakable outrage to the Irish, who value their horses above all else, and Colum was an Irishman.

Colum makes several interesting emendations. In a footnote he defines Annwn as "the Realm of Faerie" (13), rather than as the Welsh Land of the Dead. He omits Efnisien's repentance, so that the destruction of the cauldron appears to be part of the general battle rather than a heroic self-sacrifice. Most importantly, there is no indication of the wholesale slaughter of the Irish people or the five pregnant women who survive to repopulate the island. Instead, Colum stresses the fact that there were only seven Welsh survivors of the battle, from which a reader may infer that the Irish were the winners in this encounter. The author's Irish nationality is no doubt responsible for these changes. In the Welsh text, the Irish are cowardly villains who deserve the harsh treatment they receive at Bran's hands; in Colum's retelling their duplicity is glossed over, whereas the Welsh Efnisien retains every possible ounce of his villainy.

Except for changes such as these, *The Island of the Mighty* is basically a reworking of Guest's translation. Colum retains much of Guest's language and attempts to fit his additions into a similar style. In his introduction he expresses admiration for the literary qualities of his

source. In fact, Guest's magnificently biblical language faced no literary competition until 1948, when *The Golden Cockerel Mabinogion* appeared. Translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, this new version earned praise both for its accuracy and for the beauty of its language, and J. M. Dent and Sons claimed it immediately for the Everyman Library. The new translators had the benefit of working with an earlier Welsh text from the White Book of Rhydderch, which had not been available to scholars until 1907. They also had the benefit of being professors of English (Gwyn Jones) and Welsh (Thomas Jones), and were therefore eminently qualified to produce an English translation of a medieval Welsh text. The Jones and Jones Everyman edition has been the standard English translation of the Welsh legends ever since, replacing the Guest translation with one that balances literary style and scholarly accuracy.

The Jones and Jones translation was not intended for children, although Dent published an enlarged and illustrated edition in 1976. The enlarged edition retained the scholarly introduction and footnotes of the 1974 revised edition; only the textual notes were omitted, although they were still listed in the Table of Contents.

In 1955 Gwyn Jones undertook a version aimed distinctly at a young audience, adapted from his and Thomas Jones's Everyman edition and published by Oxford University Press as *Welsh Legends and Folk-Tales*. It included selected portions of the Mabinogi, a few of the other stories collected in the Mabinogion, and some additional folktales. Despite an acknowledgement to Thomas Jones for permission to adapt parts of the Everyman, the two volumes bear little resemblance to each other. The Everyman is a close literal rendering of the medieval Welsh text, written in a style that John Rowe Townsend would no doubt regard as falsely archaic. For his children's version, Gwyn Jones released himself from the letter of the law and allowed himself the grace to explore his own considerable storytelling skills. Although the language continues to have an archaic flavor, Jones drops the use of "thee," "thou," and their attendant verb forms, as well as "whence," "thence," and an occasional "lest."

Jones finds a unique solution to the problem of the scribal error misinterpreted by Dr. Owen Pughe and popularized by Lady Charlotte Guest: he avoids using either term, "Mabinogi" or "Mabinogion." He presents the Four Branches as "The Four Branches of Story." The individual branches he renames "Pwyll and Pryderi," "The Story of Branwen," "The Trials of Dyfed," and "Lleu and the Flowerface." He also abandons the formulaic ending, "And thus ends this branch of the Mabi-

nogi." There are several possible reasons for these changes: the author may have wanted to avoid compounding the error by repetition, or he may have intended to simplify things for an audience of English-speaking children who would have been unfamiliar with the Welsh word "Mabinogion." The latter was Padraic Colum's reason for calling his book *The Island of the Mighty*. Gwyn Jones certainly simplifies the name "Bendigeidfran" to "Bran"; on the other hand, Lleu Llaw Gyffes and Blodeuwedd retain all their proper syllables, perhaps because both names have an onomastic purpose in the story.

Jones begins his children's version in the middle of the First Branch, omitting Pwyll's encounter with Arawn and subsequent sojourn in Annwn. Arawn is replaced by an old man with two deerhounds (white with red ears—the traditional Celtic hellhounds). The old man tells Pwyll about the magical properties of the hill known as Gorsedd Arberth, then he and his dogs vanish. The old man and his hounds reappear in the Third Branch to give Pryderi the identical information about Gorsedd Arberth; once again, the old man vanishes suddenly. The only purpose served by this character is to provide another link between the First and Third Branches—a link with mysterious and supernatural overtones. The old man is a tribute to Jones's storytelling abilities in that he fits seamlessly into the tales, although his presence is not necessary to the plot.

Rhiannon loses a bit of her strong character in the new version. When Pwyll makes a rash promise in the Everyman edition, Rhiannon says, "Be dumb as long as thou wilt. . . . Never was there a man made feebler use of his wits than thou hast" (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 13). The new, adapted Rhiannon is slightly less sharp-tongued: " 'You may well sit dumb,' said Rhiannon, 'and it would have been kinder to us both had you sat dumb long since' " (Gwyn Jones 18–19).

Jones rearranges some elements of the plot to make them more effective. Whereas the Everyman has Rhiannon outlining to Pwyll her entire plan to avoid marrying Gwawl, Jones withholds the details from the reader, giving them a greater dramatic impact when the plan unfolds. The author adds foreshadowing as well; for example, Bran experiences a feeling of foreboding while watching Matholwch and Branwen sail away towards Ireland.

The main addition Gwyn Jones makes to the story of Branwen is to enlarge the roles of her brothers. In the original tale, only Bran and Efnisien have sizeable parts; two other brothers, Manawydan and Nisien, are barely mentioned. In this retelling, Bran offers to let Nisien settle the dispute caused by the mutilation of Matholwch's horses, and the

author invents an entire scene to extend the characterization of all four brothers:

... it was observed of Bran that long after the ships were out of sight he walked the shore with slow, sad steps, and that there were tears in his eyes.

"Brother and King," said the wise Manawydan, "does one weep on a wedding day?"

"Fear not, Bran," added Nisien. "All living things beyond the sea will love our sister Branwen."

"If not," threatened the fierce Efnisien, "we will cross over and destroy Ireland." (37)

The author also increases Efnisien's sense of dishonor over not being consulted about Branwen's marriage and tones down the violence of the mutilation by omitting the details, which are explicit in the *Everyman*. As a result of these changes, all of the brothers become more solid and human, if slightly stereotyped, and Efnisien's motivations are more understandable.

Gwyn Jones makes major changes in the Fourth Branch, always the most difficult one to edit for the presumed innocence of a young audience. First, he excises the rape of Goewin and the punishment of Gilfaethwy and Gwydion. Pryderi's death receives only a casual mention. There are no virgin footholders or magic virginity tests. Instead, the infant Lleu appears (without his twin brother) as if from nowhere: "It happened one day when Gwydion was lying in his bed of a morning, half-awake, half-asleep, that he heard a low cry from the chest he kept at his bed's foot" (67). Noting a resemblance between himself and the baby, Gwydion raises him as a son. When the two of them arrive on Aranhod's doorstep, the relationship between Gwydion and Aranhod turns out to be that of lovers rather than brother and sister, and Lleu is the son of the two of them. The relationship is not stated explicitly, but the references are clear enough for an intelligent reader to make the connection. Nowhere in this version does the author refer to Lleu as Gwydion's nephew, but always as his son. The altered relationship clarifies the ambiguity of the original but also robs it of some of its rich complexities. As far as the plot is concerned, the changes are beneficial, for they provide a focus and direction lacking in the medieval text.<sup>2</sup>

The author's omissions are as important as his additions. Besides leaving out characters and sections of tales, he makes smaller adjustments as well. Whereas in the *Everyman* edition Blodeuwedd's maidens drown because they are running backwards in fear of Gwydion's wrath, in *Welsh Legends and Folk-Tales* Jones merely records the fact of the

drowning, omitting the cause. In Jones's First Branch, Teyrnon's wife does not pretend that the infant Pryderi is her own child. Such excisions seem to be intended to tighten the plot by removing extraneous material, as becomes clear by some larger cuts: the story behind the Cauldron of Rebirth, the paragraph about the pregnant Irish women and the repopulation of Ireland, the servitude of Pryderi and Rhiannon while they are under enchantment. In the original, all of these excerpts draw attention away from the main action.

One change that does not improve or tighten the plot is the kind of change most often associated with adaptations for children: all references to sex are removed. The Everyman edition is as blunt as the original Welsh text about men and women sleeping together, but cohabitation is a problem for Gwyn Jones as a children's editor. Pregnancy is apparently no longer a taboo subject in 1955, but rape, incest, and adultery seem to remain on the blacklist. Whenever possible, characters marry; Gronw Bebyr and Blodeuwedd, the adulterers, fall in love, but they do not make love. Even married couples do not appear in bedroom scenes. Cigfa is no longer terrified of being left alone with Manawydan, and the new relationship between Aranrhod and Gwydion is drawn by implication only.

Although the adult sexual motivations are missing in *Welsh Legends and Folk-Tales*, the author expands the characterization in a way that compensates for the loss. Added dialogue, such as that between Bran and his brothers, gives depth to the characters. Emotion-tinged verbs, adjectives, and adverbs provide clear signposts to young readers, whose interpretive skills would be hard-pressed by the morally ambiguous statements and actions in the Everyman edition. Perhaps Gwyn Jones's method of characterization leans towards stereotypes, but it is only a slight inclination.

Among the retellings between *The Boy's Mabinogion* and those of the 1980s, Gwyn Jones's book is a literary highlight, certainly the best children's version of the Mabinogi that had been done to that date and possibly still the best. If publication records are any indication of literary success, continued reprintings of the volume in the four decades following its publication suggest that it is the most popular children's version of the Mabinogi. The only edition that offers any competition is Gwyn Thomas and Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Tales from the Mabinogion*, published by Gollancz in 1984, slightly more than one hundred years after Sidney Lanier introduced the Mabinogion to English-speaking children. Whereas Gwyn Jones provides a lively and imaginative romp through the Welsh legends, Thomas and Crossley-Holland main-

tain a dignified stateliness, which, while internally consistent, is less in keeping with the high-spirited humor of the original.

However, in the decades between Gwyn Jones's retelling and the Thomas/Crossley-Holland edition, there were other attempts to rework the Welsh legends for younger audiences. The 1960s saw several publications, including Wyn Griffith's *The Adventures of Pryderi: Taken from The Mabinogion*. This book originated as a broadcast on the BBC's *Welsh Children's Hour* in 1943, but it was not published until nineteen years later. Griffith is another supporter of W. J. Gruffydd's theory of the Mabinogi's mythic origins as the exploits of a god-sized Pryderi; he therefore excises all the parts of the Mabinogi that are not concerned with Pryderi: Pwyll's adventures in Annwn, the story of Branwen, and the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes. Griffith seems to share some of Lanier's aversion to pregnancy and virginity, but he is more direct about sex itself: "That night Gwydion went back to the court and, in Math's absence, contrived that Gilfaethwy should make love to Goewin" (n.p.). That is not the same thing as rape, but it is more honest than a contrived marriage.

A Welsh collection that is still easy to find in secondhand bookshops is Olwen Bowen's *Tales from the Mabinogion* (1969), not to be confused with the Thomas/Crossley-Holland book of the same name, both of which were published by Gollancz. The Bowen book is not literarily memorable. Her retellings, which include four of the additional tales from the Mabinogion as well as the Mabinogi itself, are safe and sanitized. She does not mention Pwyll's honorable conduct towards Arawn's queen or Cigfa's fear of Manawydan. In fact, the author removes or softens violence as well as sex, as in this description of Efnisien mutilating the horses: "and he rushed at the horses with his sword and attacked them, harming them so that they could never be of use again" (Bowen 36). The difficult Fourth Branch is omitted entirely. However, Bowen retains the pregnant mouse.

Judging by the sudden spate of publications in the 1970s and 1980s, there has been an explosion of interest in Welsh legends and folk tales during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Small portions of the Mabinogi appeared in Linda Barret Osborne's *Song of the Harp* (1975), Irma Chilton's *The Magic Cauldron* (1976), Elisabeth Sheppard-Jones's *Stories of Wales* (1976), and T. Llew Jones's *Tales the Wind Told* (1979). All of these books are collections of folktales.

One of the first appearances of the Mabinogi in the 1980s is the retelling of the Second Branch in Joy Chant's *The High Kings* (1983), one of those large, glossy, illustrated books often called "coffee-table books."



Although it seems to be aimed at an audience of adult fantasy fans, the book also found a place in the children's sections of bookstores.<sup>3</sup> Chant presents each tale as a story told in King Arthur's court, the storytelling sessions being spread over a number of years and separated by several paragraphs of pseudoscholarly information on Celtic life, culture, and character. The author adds a new character to the story of Branwen: the sea god Llyr, who fathers Bran, Branwen and Manawydan, and lays a geas on Bran that he must never be contained in a house or ship.<sup>4</sup> When Branwen and Matholwch are sailing to Ireland after their wedding, Llyr stops by the ship to bless the union and warn Matholwch that if he ever strikes Branwen three times, she will have to go back to Britain. This last warning is a familiar motif in folktale; it appears several times in Welsh tales, most famously in the story of the Physicians of Myddfai, whose mother was a mermaid. When Branwen's son Gwern is born, a druid prophesies that he and Branwen will bring destruction upon the Irish; in this way Chant provides a stronger reason for the Irish to turn against Branwen than that found in the original (a tardy sense of insult over the mutilation of the horses). Chant also strengthens the relationship between Branwen and Efnisien to make his unreasoning behavior more understandable. The main effect of Chant's changes is to add a layer of religious mysticism in an attempt to transform legend into myth. Rather than improving the tale, this mystic overlay detracts from the human passions that motivate the characters, as do the borrowed folktale motifs of the three causeless blows and the geas on Bran.

Harri Webb's *Tales from Wales* (1984) is more definitely intended for children, and younger children at that. The stories are much simplified and there is no indication that any of them are linked. Like Lanier, Webb reorders the Four Branches and does not refer to them as the Mabinogi. In this version, "Branwen" is followed by "Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed," "Pwyll and Rhiannon," "Pryderi," "Kilhwch and Olwen," "The Bride of Flowers," and other selections from the Mabinogion and outside sources. The style is one of forced archaism. The most noticeable change in this version is the inclusion of Mathonwy himself in the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes. In the original text, Mathonwy is an ancestor who appears only as a name in the title of the Fourth Branch. Webb's Lleu has three magicians to assist him—Math, Mathonwy, and Gwydion—and the villain of the story, Aranrhod, dies in this version. All sexual references have been excised, no doubt because of the intended audience of younger children. Webb also removes the moral ambiguity attached to some of the characters and sorts them into two definite categories of

hero and villain, thus removing any need for the reader to make moral judgments.

Another coffee-table book came out in 1986: Anne Ross's *Druids, Gods and Heroes from Celtic Mythology*. This was part of a series on mythology published by Peter Lowe. Illustrated by Roger Garland in an attractive cartoonish style—heavy black outlines, rounded contours, bright colors—and told in a simple, direct manner, this book emphasizes Irish tales over those of the other Celtic cultures. However, there is a short, sixteen-page section entitled “The Four Branches of the Mabinogion.” Because of the extent of the material covered in the volume, the author had to be selective, but the selections show a definite change in the editorial practices associated with previous children's versions of the Mabinogi. Instead of following the examples of her predecessors and excising two-thirds of the Fourth Branch, Ross retains most of it and chooses to shorten the First and Second Branches. Rhiannon disappears from the story, as do Gwern, Gronw Bebyr, and the Cauldron of Rebirth. Many events are summarized. Although she is not explicit about all the sexual content, Ross does write that Arawn and his wife “were loving with each other” (69). The most daring choice the author makes is to retain the rape of Goewin and the punishment of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy.<sup>5</sup> Goewin here tells Math directly, “I was raped” (78). This is the first children's version to use the word “raped.” However, Ross omits Blodeuwedd's betrayal of Lleu, which is one of the few sections of the story most editors retain; she concludes the tale with the creation of Blodeuwedd and her marriage to Lleu. This suggests a “happily ever after” ending, although the author does add a short paragraph indicating that there is more to the story.

In 1987 Haydn Middleton produced two books based on the Mabinogi. Although both appeared to be picture books for children, one was actually an adult rendition of the Four Branches, built around Middleton's reconstruction of an ancient Celtic religion. Entitled *Son of Two Worlds*, the book tells the story of Pwyll and Pryderi in their symbolic role as king. It is a discomfiting, disturbing book that hovers on the borders of the horror genre and soft pornography. The other book, *Island of the Mighty*, not to be confused with Padraic Colum's book of the same title, is a volume in the Oxford Myth and Legends series and is more conventional in its approach to the tales.

*Island of the Mighty* is an attempt to consolidate some of the stories in the Mabinogion by providing a unifying element, much as Joy Chant does in *The High Kings* with her frame of storytelling sessions in Arthur's court. In this instance, Middleton uses giants, and Bran in particu-

lar, as the unifying element. The author writes, "In the very beginning, the giants came to Wales" (3). The giants are peaceful and wise and love music. Middleton omits the First, Third, and Fourth Branches and concentrates on expanding the story of Branwen and linking it to the native tales "Lludd and Llefelys," "The Dream of Macsen Wledig," and "The Dream of Rhonabwy." The links are provided by Bran's head, buried in the White Mount in London at the end of "Branwen," from which vantage point it provides protection to the island and sends dreams and warnings to future rulers of Britain.

Middleton's version of "Branwen" begins with the arrival from Annwn (from Ireland in the original text) of Llasar and his wife with the Cauldron of Rebirth, predicting that Bran will soon have need of warriors. Bran, however, is a confirmed pacifist: " 'But still,' said Bran, 'I have no need of such a marvellous thing. This Island is a place of peace. We have no wars here. We have no warriors' " (6). What Bran does have is one brother, Efnisien, who maims Matholwch's horses because Branwen has been married to the Irish king without Efnisien's consent. From this point the story continues in its usual manner through Branwen's punishment and rescue and the destructive war with Ireland. Middleton omits the Feast of the Head—the eighty-seven years of magical fellowship which the Welsh survivors enjoy in company with Bran's head after the war. Bran's warning and prediction to the survivors about opening the door that looks towards Cornwall becomes in Middleton's hands a prophecy for Britain:

But the people of the Island must always remember this—one day a palace will appear on the coast of Wales. Its hall will have three doors. Do not open the third door. (28)<sup>6</sup>

This prophecy is part of the link the author uses to tie the other stories to the Second Branch.

Besides attempting to provide unifying elements, Middleton also elaborates the characterization in the Second Branch, mainly in the figures of Bran and Efnisien. Like others who want to retell the Mabinogi along the lines of modern narrative conventions, the author omits what he perceives to be extraneous detail—for instance, the presence of Manawydan and Nisien, who play no active role in the story. Similarly, he enlarges the roles of the major characters and provides motivation for their actions. As in Gwyn Jones's *Welsh Legends and Folk-Tales*, Middleton's Bran experiences a premonition of disaster as he watches Matholwch and Branwen sail away. The murder of Gwern is a result of Efnisien's secret knowledge that the Irish are planning an ambush, and

Efnisien's destruction of the cauldron proceeds from his realization that he has brought war to a land of peace-loving giants:

The giant king's face was knotted with bitterness. This is how it is with wars—anger breeds anger just as evil breeds evil. Efnisien saw that look on Bran's face. It was a look he had never expected to see on a giant. The sight of it, for some reason, troubled him. (24)

Considered as a retelling of the Mabinogi, Middleton's *Island of the Mighty* is not successful. Although it is faithful to most of the events in the Second Branch, it changes their import by adding modern political philosophy to explain their cause and effect. The links to the other tales are awkward and inconsistent, unlike the loose narrative links that connect the Four Branches in the original text. However, the book must have been economically successful since Oxford reissued it in 1997.

Another English-language children's version came out in 1988. Published by Y Lolfa, a small Welsh publishing house in the village of Tallybont, *The Magic of the Mabinogion* is an adaptation of a Welsh retelling, *Mabinogi'r Plant* ["The Children's Mabinogi"], published by Y Lolfa in 1986. Both versions were the work of Dr. Rhiannon Ifans, who, however, had the assistance of Elan Closs Stephens in editing the English text. The purpose of the English translation, according to Ifans's preface, is to present part of each story "as a foretaste for children of what they may read in their entirety some day" (3). As this quote suggests, the stories are intended for younger children and are therefore much condensed and simplified. The parts of the Four Branches selected for inclusion are indicated by their new titles: "Rhiannon and the Magic Stallion," "Branwen in Ireland," "Mice! Mice!" and "Llew Llaw Gyffes's Secret." Ifans also includes sections of the other Mabinogion tales.

Ifans and Helen Holmes, the illustrator, capitalize on the humor in the Mabinogi.<sup>7</sup> The chase after Rhiannon is told with comic effect while remaining true to the original, and the illustrations feature the hapless horses, exhausted by their efforts to catch up with Rhiannon. There is even a moment of humor in the tragedy of Branwen, when the Irish swineherds see what they take to be a forest, a mountain, and two lakes approaching Ireland at great speed. Ifans does not take full advantage of the comic potential in the Third Branch (the story of Manawydan); much of it proceeds from characterization, and her retelling reduces characterization almost to nonexistence. In the story of Llew Llaw Gyffes, of course, there is little comic potential. The artist's cartoonlike style is best suited to humor and tends to distract the reader in the more serious

sections of the tales. Holmes also has difficulty drawing small animals: Branwen's starling looks like a small black duck, the eagle into which Lleu is transformed sports a parrot's beak, and the pregnant mouse is definitely a koala bear.

Ifans's editorial practices are as conservative as those of most children's editors. Her couples marry rather than sleep together; even Blodeuwedd and Gronw Bebyr marry each other after Lleu becomes an eagle. While Ifans does not actually say that Aranrhod is married, she suggests respectability in the opening paragraph of the Fourth Branch:

Arianrhod [*sic*] had two sons, a fair-haired boy called Dylan, and a newborn baby. When the time came for Arianrhod to hold office at court, she gave her children to others to bring up and the little baby, Llew Llaw Gyffes, became great friends with Gwydion. (36)

The complex relationships among the Children of Don (Gwydion and Aranrhod and their siblings) are completely ignored. Although Helen Holmes provides an illustration of Lleu and Blodeuwedd in bed together, they are fully clothed and engaged merely in conversation. Ifans retains the pregnant mouse (or koala bear), but "pregnant" is simply an adjective in her hands.

Ifans adds a number of adjectives and adverbs to the tales, doubtless as signposts for her young readers. Pwyll and his courtiers are "very excited" about the mystery of Rhiannon (10), Rhiannon calls out to Pwyll "happily" and chats with him "easily" (13), Bendigeidfran is "very sad" about Branwen's punishment (18) and "greatly pleased" about having a house built for him (20), Pryderi and Manawydan have an "uneasy" feeling about a castle (26), Cigfa cries "bitterly" (28), Manawydan walks out "jauntily" (29), and so on. These additions and deletions are understandable in light of Ifans's intentions for the book—to introduce the legends to very young readers.

The prize retelling of the 1980s is Gwyn Thomas and Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Tales from the Mabinogion*. Although it was published in 1984, before Ross, Middleton, and Ifans, I have reserved the discussion of its merits for the final section of this chapter because of its importance. In terms of creative literature, Gwyn Jones's *Welsh Legends and Folk-Tales* may surpass the Thomas/Crossley-Holland edition in literary merit, but in a survey of changing editorial practices in children's literature, the latter represents a milestone. It is a milestone in other ways as well: the first children's picture book commissioned by the Welsh Arts Council and its first attempt at international copublishing, a critical and commercial success for a minority culture that is unused to international

recognition. Because of the success of *Tales from the Mabinogion*, the Welsh legends have begun to receive the kind of popularity they have not seen since Lady Charlotte Guest's nineteenth-century translation. This time, however, the recognition and popularity are for a children's book.

Besides the Welsh and English versions, the book has also been translated into Danish and, remarkably, Scots Gaelic. The Welsh edition came first. As Kevin Crossley-Holland remembers the events leading up to his own involvement in the project, the idea originated with the Welsh Arts Council:

The Welsh Arts Council, maybe in cahoots with the University of Wales Press, invited Gwyn Thomas to retell tales from the Mabinogi, and he did so, and I understand did so very beautifully, in Welsh. That was his commission. They then had the bright idea that they had a good English children's book waiting in the wings if only Gwyn could translate it into lapidary English. In the event, Gwyn's English version was very rough-edged and spirited certainly, but it needed quite a lot of editorial attention. The University of Wales Press, I think, asked the Welsh Arts Council if they could dredge up an English children's writer who'd had any experience of working either in the world of epic or romance or at least in that kind of territory. And I guess the Welsh Arts Council suggested me.<sup>8</sup>

One reason Crossley-Holland may have sprung to mind, other than the fact that he had experience retelling English and Norse folktales and Anglo-Saxon epics, was that his name had market value in the world of English children's literature ("English" in the national rather than the linguistic sense), whereas Gwyn Thomas was little known beyond the academic Welsh-language culture.<sup>9</sup> Crossley-Holland also had excellent publishing contacts, having worked for Macmillan, Gollancz, and Deutsch as an editor. Gollancz's well-established marketing and distribution system must account for some of the success of the English version.

Another reason for the book's popularity in Welsh and English was the illustrations by Margaret Jones. In an article for *The New Welsh Review*, Belinda Humfrey speaks of Jones's "brilliant and internationally recognised success" in illustrating the Welsh legends (39). Jones's success is remarkable in view of the fact that she had never before illustrated a children's book, although she was becoming well-known in Wales as a landscape artist.

Whatever the reason, the popularity of both the English and Welsh versions cannot be doubted: both remained in print five years after their

initial publication, and in 1989 Gollancz issued a large paperback edition of the English version. Although consideration for its copublishers prevents the University of Wales Press from releasing sales figures for the English, Danish, and Scots Gaelic editions of the book, a spokeswoman for the press confirmed that as of November of 1990 the 4,000 Welsh copies had been sold out and that the press was considering reprinting the book.<sup>10</sup> For a minority language like Welsh, 4,000 is a remarkable number; a Welsh novel for adults rarely sells 800 copies (Hughes 1127).

Evidence for the success of the English edition is more difficult to obtain, but Kevin Crossley-Holland, a Carnegie Medal winner, states that his work has seldom received better reviews than did *Tales from the Mabinogion*. Further evidence of success can be adduced from the fact that Thomas, Crossley-Holland, and Jones went on to collaborate on *The Quest for Olwen* (1988), which is the English version of Thomas's *Culhwch ac Olwen* (1988), and on Welsh and English editions of the story of Taliesin. It is interesting to note Taliesin's inclusion in what has become a series, or at least companion volumes, of Welsh legends; the decision echoes Lady Charlotte Guest's original inclusion of Taliesin in her translation of the Mabinogion more than a century earlier.

In his modern Welsh retelling of the Mabinogi, Gwyn Thomas adheres closely to the wording of the medieval text. In an Afterword ("ol-nodyn") to *Y Mabinogi* he explains that his attempt to retell the tales in his own words was a failure: "*Yn rhywle yn y broses yr oedd gwir rin 'Y Mabinogi' wedi mynd ar goll*" (86); "Somewhere in the process the true virtue of the Mabinogi had been lost" (personal translation). He came to believe in a mythic power inherent in the original words of the Middle Welsh text—in what he termed a "ritual language." As he explained to an English-language audience at a children's literature conference,

Indeed I think that some of the magic, some of the wonder of these strange medieval Welsh tales is contained in the very words used by their makers. . . . Ritual words are like spells: if you do not get the words right, the magic does not work. ("Four Branches" 21)

Capturing the mythic essence of the text is not half as important for an English audience, however, although one can aim at implying the true virtue (*Y Mabinogi* 86).

Thomas eventually either changed his views about ritual language, decided they did not apply to other Welsh legends, or perhaps became more confident of his own abilities as an editor and storyteller, because two years later he retold *Culhwch ac Olwen* in his own words, and his

new adaptation of the legend of Taliesin is an irreverent romp. Margaret Jones, who illustrates Thomas's children's books, has felt obliged to adapt her style of illustration to suit the changes in Thomas's style; because of the increased humorous content, some of her inspiration for the Taliesin illustrations came from the *Spitting Image* puppets on British television.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the discrepancies between the Welsh version and the English version are due to Kevin Crossley-Holland's injecting his own style into Thomas's literal translation. Without a close examination of the various drafts of the manuscript, however, it is impossible to tell which editorial changes each author was responsible for. Although Crossley-Holland states that his role was "in no way either conceptual or structural," it was certainly editorial, and in the editing is found the philosophy that affects how the tales are presented to children. There is a definite change in editorial practice between the Welsh version and the English.

The change is subtle. As the First Branch unfolds, there is little discrepancy between the Welsh and English editions. In the Welsh, Gwyn Thomas chooses to play down the sexual aspect of Pwyll's relationship with Arawn's queen. However, he does have Arawn tell Pwyll, "*fe rodda i'r wraig dlysa a welaist ti erioed yn wraig iti*" (11); "I will give the loveliest woman you ever saw as a wife for you" (personal translation). This sounds more direct than the English version's "I will give you the most beautiful woman you've ever seen to live with" (*Tales* 11). Neither is as blunt as the original text, which the Everyman edition translates as "the fairest lady thou didst ever see I will set to sleep with thee each night" (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 4).

The English translation follows closely Thomas's Welsh account of Pwyll's encounter with the queen:

So the time came for them to go to sleep, and off they went—Pwyll and the Queen. As soon as they got into bed, Pwyll turned to face his side of the bed, so that he had his back to the Queen. The next day, they were affectionate and friendly to one another. But however affectionate they were during the day, every night was exactly the same as the first night. (*Tales* 12)

On the first night of Arawn's return, the first thing he does is "to talk to her, and turn to her," and she tells him, "for a year from last night, from the moment we'd go to bed, I've had no warmth from you, no words, nor your face to me—not to mention anything else" (*Tales* 14). In the medieval text, as translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, the first thing Arawn does is "to converse with his wife and indulge in loving pleasure and affection with her" (*Mabinogion* 7). Still, Gwyn Thomas



has not excised much in either language, and both versions retain the queen's remark that Pwyll has withstood great temptation.

Thomas and Crossley-Holland are more direct about Pwyll's encounter with Gwawl, in which Gwawl says, "Tonight you're going to sleep with the woman I love more than anyone" (*Tales* 19). Similarly, on Pwyll and Rhiannon's wedding night, they retire to their room and spend the night "pleasantly" (22), an account of the wedding night that differs little from the medieval text, which, however, puts more emphasis on the pleasure of the experience.

In the Second Branch, both versions are blunt about Matholwch sleeping with Branwen. In the Third Branch, Cigfa's fear of being left alone with Manawydan is played down, but the mouse remains pregnant. Otherwise, the two middle branches are true to their source.

Although Thomas and Crossley-Holland do not use the word "rape" in the Fourth Branch, they make it clear to a mature reader what is happening:

And Gilfaethwy slept with Goewin in Math's bed, and the maidservants were roughly handled and thrown out of their quarters. This shame befell Goewin that night completely against her will. (*Tales* 68)

The passive voice of Thomas's modern Welsh version—following closely his source—puts a slightly different emphasis on the event, suggesting an active role by an unseen person, presumably Gwydion, who has engineered the plot from its inception.

Goewin is not as blunt as she could be when she tells Math about the rape; the word choice, particularly in the English translation, lends a softening effect through archaism. Goewin tells Math that Gwydion and Gilfaethwy "ravished me and brought shame on you, and that in your own chamber and in your own bed" (*Tales* 69). Although the Everyman edition also uses archaic latinate words, it blends them with the blunter Anglo-Saxon derivatives that add force and directness to any statement.

Anne Ross was one of the first children's editors to retain the rape and punishment, but Thomas and Crossley-Holland predate her account by two years. While Ross is more explicit about the rape, Thomas and Crossley-Holland's account of the punishment is much more detailed than Ross's, making the gender transformation and the birth of three children as clear, if not as emphatic, as does the medieval text. As Math tells Gwydion and Gilfaethwy when he gives them back their own forms, "if you did me wrong, you've been punished enough, and shamed by having these children" (*Tales* 71).

The story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes is a close translation of the original text. Aranrhod fails the magic virginity test, although here, as in most translations, the editors use the euphemistic “maiden” instead of “virgin.” They omit the ambiguous pronouns that obscure Gwydion’s exact relationship to Lleu, but retain the implication of illegitimacy. Blodeuwedd and Gronw Bebyr sleep together, and there is no softening of the image of the wounded Lleu in his eagle form, dripping “rotten flesh and maggots” (*Tales* 80), just as there is no compromise in the description of the maiming of the horses in “Branwen.”

On the question of sex and violence, the Welsh and English versions reflect a similar editorial policy: to include everything, but to deemphasize the sexual content. Where they separate from each other is on the question of the Welshness of the contents. Although the English version retains the Welsh personal names, whenever possible they are translated into their English meaning (or a close approximation thereof). Thus “Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid” becomes “Llasar the Canny Barterer” and “Unig Glew Ysgwyd” becomes “Unig Valiant Shield.” The Welsh tradition of identifying a person by listing his or her genealogy to the fourth generation finds no place in the English translation, so that “Cigfa ferch Gwyn Gohoyw fab Gloyw Walltlydan fab Casnar Wledig” becomes simply “Cigfa, daughter of Gwyn the Resplendent.” Some of the place names disappear between the Welsh and English versions, particularly the onomastic ones. Similarly, a well-known place name like Annwn is transformed into “the Other World,” and the common Welsh word “cantref,” which is usually retained in English translations, becomes “region.” When Bendigeidfran acts as a human bridge for his men, the Welsh edition pauses to explain that this is the origin of the proverb, “He who is a leader, let him be a bridge to his people,” but this is omitted in the English edition. Finally, the most central word of all, “Mabinogi,” which appears without explanation in the Welsh version, is replaced by “Mabinogion” in the title of the English translation, with a foreword by Gwyn Thomas explaining that the word properly applies only to the Four Branches. In the English book, “Mabinogi” appears only in the formulaic ending to each tale, “And that is how this branch of the Mabinogi ends.” The inconsistency may be a compromise between Thomas and Crossley-Holland; “Mabinogion” is the form most familiar to English readers, but as Professor of Welsh at the University College of North Wales, Gwyn Thomas is well aware of the linguistic error behind the word.

Whatever the reason, there appears to have been a limited attempt to anglicize the stories in *Tales from the Mabinogion*. Whether the anglici-

zation was a concession to the age of the audience or to their language is uncertain, but English translations intended for adults do not usually anglicize the names and contents to such an extent. Kevin Crossley-Holland's claim that he and Thomas did not "make very many concessions . . . in terms of idea, in terms of mouth-cracking names" may not be completely accurate.

However, when compared to other versions for children, both Thomas's *Y Mabinogi* and his and Crossley-Holland's *Tales from the Mabinogion* show a great deal of honesty and directness in their handling of the adult motivations and behavior in the tales. Editorial practices in children's literature had changed drastically in the century since Sidney Lanier's *Boy's Mabinogion*. First pregnancy became an acceptable topic, followed in general chronological order by violence, sex, adultery, rape, and incest. By the time these bilingual volumes were being prepared, attitudes towards children's literature had changed so much that Margaret Jones was advised to add pubic hair to her illustration of the naked Blodeuwedd.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, there has been no outcry from the self-appointed guardians who make judgments on the moral content of children's books; they have apparently been blind to the rape and incest and violence that would bring attempts at censorship to a realistic novel for children.

The change in attitude is reflected in the increased sophistication of content in both text and illustration. As Belinda Humfrey says of Margaret Jones:

The books she has illustrated are largely presented and critically received as for "younger readers" but their texts are modern racy renderings of complex and demanding stories originally for adults, and Margaret Jones's pictures, no different in style from works intended by her for adults, carry much literary and artistic allusion blended with her own sign language. (39)

Nevertheless, despite changes in the nature and number of the concessions made by children's editors in the past century, the protective didactic strain can still be seen, particularly in retellings for younger children. The adult concern for children's moral growth—a concern that might be termed paternalistic—is reflected in Kevin Crossley-Holland's explanation of his editorial philosophy:

I don't think there are any no-go areas in children's books. In the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century there were all kinds of taboos, but to give you the well-rehearsed and often voiced argument, [nowadays] children are exposed to all kinds of atrocities on all sides. They have only to flick a

button and there it is in their own sitting room or kitchen. Moreover, because these atrocities are presented piecemeal and for adults, they are lacking in moral context, and heaven knows what damage they do and what children make of them. . . . Children are no less intelligent and no less sensitive than adults; it's simply that they lack the defining ground of experience, and they therefore can't think comparatively. And so they see the violence and believe that violence to be the norm. That is not the case in a children's book, where the norm is a moral norm, or at least a moral norm is held up to be desirable. Within the framework there can be rape or incest or murder or what have you, but only provided it's within some kind of moral context.

Morality was also the main concern of Sidney Lanier in 1881; only the boundaries defining what is morally acceptable and what is appropriate for children have changed.

## NOTES

1. According to Robin Gwyndaf, a folklorist at St. Ffagan's Folk Museum in Cardiff, the increased anglicization was due to the Act of Union of 1536, which virtually outlawed Welsh language and customs. The folk customs were further blacklisted during the Puritan movement of the seventeenth century and the religious revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nonconformism had its strongest hold on Wales throughout the nineteenth century. The oral storytelling tradition remained strong despite official disapproval, but little of it was recorded or translated until the turn of the century (Gwyndaf 53–71).

2. Both the Celtic and the medieval concepts of storytelling were, of course, different from modern literary narrative practices, but as all the texts discussed in this book are intended for nineteenth- or twentieth-century audiences, modern expectations as to structure and contents are more to the point than medieval ones.

3. Personal observation places *The High Kings* in the children's section of three London bookshops and Ystwyth Books of Aberystwyth in 1989.

4. "Geas," also spelled "geis," is a term from Irish folklore meaning "a solemn injunction against doing a specified thing"; it has overtones of prophesy, curse, and magic spell. Ignoring a geas has dire and tragic consequences. The word is sometimes translated "fate," but that does not have the same connotations.

5. These two brothers are transformed into a series of male and female animals and have children by each other. According to Juliette Wood, compiler of a motif index for Welsh folk literature, this punishment is unique in international folk tale (lecture given at the Aberystwyth Celtic Summer School, 18 July 1989).

6. In the original story, Bran's warning to the seven Welsh survivors is part of a statement about coming events. Having been wounded in the foot with a poisoned spear, Bran orders the survivors to cut off his head: "And take the head

... and carry it to the White Mount in London, and bury it with its face towards France. And you will be a long time upon the road. In Harddlech you will be feasting seven years, and the birds of Rhiannon singing unto you. And the head will be as pleasant company to you as ever it was at best when it was on me. And at Gwales in Penfro you will be fourscore years; and until you open the door towards Aber Henfelen, the side facing Cornwall, you may bide there, and the head with you uncorrupted. But from the time you have opened the door, you may not bide there: make for London to bury the head" (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 37–38).

7. According to Margaret Jones, illustrator of Gwyn Thomas and Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Tales from the Mabinogion* and *The Quest for Olwen*, children are most responsive to humorous illustrations, so she too looks for the humor in the Welsh material she illustrates (personal interview, 4 October 1990).

8. All quotations from Kevin Crossley-Holland are taken from a personal interview conducted on 20 September 1990.

9. Even after the success of *Tales from the Mabinogion* and its sequel, *The Quest for Olwen*, Gwyn Thomas was not listed in the third edition of *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers* (Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1989), although both titles appear in the list of Crossley-Holland's works. Neither author is listed in the 1995 edition.

10. This information comes from a telephone interview with Ceinwen Jones of the University of Wales Press, 6 November 1990.

11. *Spitting Image* is a popular British television program that satirizes current events. It features life-size puppets that are wicked caricatures of public figures. This aspect of caricature is what Margaret Jones has drawn on for her Taliesin illustrations, although she claims to have no real people in mind as her models.

12. Personal interview with Margaret Jones, 4 October 1990.

## *Chapter 3*

# Kenneth Morris's *Book of the Three Dragons*

Although retellings of the Mabinogi have abounded throughout the twentieth century, the tales were slow to invade the realm of fiction. Creative writers were drawing inspiration from the Arthurian tales (though not necessarily those in the Mabinogion) long before Malory, but the Four Branches remained a largely neglected source of material until well into this century, their main point of interest to most people being their proximity to the Welsh Arthurian tales. The earliest fictional incarnation appears to be Kenneth Morris's *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* (1914), a mythic interpretation of the events of the Mabinogi, written under the auspices of the American branch of the Theosophical Society and intended for adult readers. Morris later wrote a sequel that was marketed for children—*Book of the Three Dragons* (1930). The only other early work of fiction based on the Mabinogi was Evangeline Walton's *The Virgin and the Swine* (1936), which retold the Fourth

Branch and was also intended for adults.<sup>1</sup> Except for Morris and Walton, creative writers did not discover the riches of the Mabinogi until Robert Graves used the Welsh tales as the basis of his "historical grammar of poetic myth" in *The White Goddess*, first published in 1948. *The White Goddess* sparked intense interest in Welsh myth and legend, and it had a marked influence on the imaginations of several important children's writers, as later chapters will discuss.

Neither Morris nor Walton has received much critical attention, although there has been a recent surge of interest in both writers. Kenneth J. Zahorski and Robert H. Boyer, who compiled a bibliography on Morris, Walton, and Lloyd Alexander, credit the science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin with stimulating the new interest in Morris. In a seminal article of science fiction and fantasy criticism, "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," Le Guin praises Morris as one of a trio of "master stylists" (88) in fantasy and quotes from *Book of the Three Dragons* to support her claims. The interest created by Le Guin's article encouraged new editions of both of Morris's books in 1978 and is no doubt responsible for the recent publication of two other books by Morris: *The Chalkihite Dragon*, a novel based on Aztec myth which Morris wrote for the Theosophical Society and which remained unpublished until 1992, and a collection of Morris's short stories, *The Dragon Path* (1995). The latter includes several children's stories based on Welsh traditional tales, some from the Mabinogi, but they were originally published in minor theosophical magazines and have only recently been made available to a wide audience through the publication of *The Dragon Path*. However, the renaissance of interest which resulted from Le Guin's article seems to be limited to the specialized field of science fiction and fantasy and has not had an impact on mainstream literary studies.

Despite the recent interest, for nearly half a century Morris's and Walton's works were out of print and forgotten. Later children's writers who borrow from the Mabinogi do not credit either Morris or Walton as an influence.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Morris's *Book of the Three Dragons* is important as the first of several works of imaginative fiction for children inspired by the Four Branches, and the use he makes of his source establishes a pattern that other writers follow, albeit unwittingly.

*Book of the Three Dragons* is a sequel to Morris's earlier work, *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed*, which was published by the Aryan Theosophical Press in 1914. Not only was the first book dedicated to Katherine Tingley, the leader of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society (as the American branch of the society was officially known), but Tingley also held the copyright. The illustrator of *Fates*, Reginald

Machell, was a fellow resident of the theosophical community in Point Loma, California. Machell also illustrated a number of Morris's short stories, which appeared in several theosophical periodicals over a period of years. The theosophical connection is not surprising, considering Morris's lifetime devotion to theosophy. At the time he was writing the book, Morris was Professor of History and Literature at Raja Yoga College, the Theosophical Society's training center in Point Loma. Although he was a native Welshman who retained a lifelong love of his country, Morris spent twenty-two years in Point Loma and only returned to his beloved Wales in 1930, at the request of the new leader of the Universal Brotherhood, to work with the Welsh lodges and preach theosophy to the miners of South Wales (Zahorski and Boyer 174–76).

Morris's yearning for his homeland is obvious in his letters and in the number of his articles, poems, and stories that are centered on Wales. More than half of the works published during Morris's first ten years in Point Loma relate to Wales. This percentage changed in the last half of his American exile, particularly after he became interested in Chinese poetry, but even that interest had a connection to Wales through the similarity between Chinese poetry and the Welsh strict meters (Zahorski and Boyer 184–85). Morris continued to publish articles, poems, and stories about Wales throughout his tenure in California, and his two major works of fiction draw on Welsh legends. His exile may have been the catalyst for his preoccupation with Wales if, as was the case with English expatriate Susan Cooper (author of a contemporary fantasy series that borrows from the *Mabinogi*), homesickness turned his thoughts towards Wales.

By the time Morris joined the Theosophical Society, the movement had gone through major changes. From its nineteenth-century roots in Madame Blavatsky's occult teachings and fraudulent spiritualism, it had divided into two branches as a result of internecine warfare. The main branch operated out of Adyar, India, although it was headed by Annie Besant in England. Under Besant, the Adyar Theosophists continued their social activism in India and Sri Lanka but also became embroiled in sexual and religious scandals.<sup>3</sup>

The second branch was the wealthy American section of the society, which had seceded from the international organization during a fierce power struggle after the death of Madame Blavatsky in 1891. Although most of the European lodges remained faithful to the Adyar group, the Irish members aligned themselves with the American rebels. The Dublin Lodge, which included such luminaries as William Butler Yeats and George Russell, was thus allied with the Point Loma utopian movement,



probably no more than an exciting vision when Morris arrived in Dublin in 1896. Morris's short stay in Dublin changed his life; it was there that he met Russell and others involved in the Celtic literary renaissance, and it was there that he was introduced to theosophy, the beliefs that were to shape the rest of his life (Zahorski and Boyer 169–70).

Under Katherine Tingley's leadership, the American section officially changed its name to The Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. In order to concentrate on building the Point Loma community, Tingley closed down most of the society's lodges, which resulted in a slow deterioration of membership and funds. When the Sanskrit scholar Gottfried de Purucker took over leadership in 1929, he inherited an organization in considerable financial disarray, worsened by the stock market crash three months after he assumed control. His solution was to relocate the community to smaller and cheaper buildings and to send out active members to reestablish the lodges (Campbell 136–41). One of those sent out was Kenneth Morris, president of the newly created Welsh section of the Theosophical Society.

Morris returned to Wales in 1930 and went straight to work. By 1932 he had won about forty followers in Cardiff and the Rhondda valley, and before his death in 1937 he had founded seven Welsh lodges (Zahorski and Boyer 177–81). Spreading the ideas of theosophy was his life's work; even his literary efforts served the greater cause. Nevertheless, he remained a minor figure both literarily and theosophically: his name does not appear in Peter Washington's recent history of theosophy, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon*.

*The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed*, Morris's first work based on the Mabinogi, is imbued with the spirit of theosophy; in fact, it attempts to reinterpret the Four Branches in light of theosophical philosophy and ideas. According to one historian of the movement, "The core of Theosophical teachings consists of four sets of ideas: evolution, man's constitution, karma and reincarnation, and after-death states" (Campbell 62). To put it simplistically, theosophists believed that all religions were at heart one and the same and that a human being could evolve spiritually by employing practices drawn mainly from eastern religions. Spiritualism, meditation, ritual—all played a major role in theosophy. Morris studied these ideas for about eighteen years before he wrote his first book, and he put a great deal of thought into the connection between theosophy and Welsh myth and legend. He had already written several articles on that specific subject for the theosophical journals: "Theosophy and the Welsh Legends," which appeared in *Century Path* in October and November of 1909; and "Certain Welsh Traditions in the

Light of the Secret Doctrine,” published in *Theosophical Path* in April of 1912.

The ideas expressed in Morris’s early theosophical articles contain the seeds for the plots of both *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* and *Book of the Three Dragons*. In the sixth of a series of articles on Welsh literature, Morris remarks that a “little imagination could expand the Dimetian cycle into a great epic,” then he proceeds to lay out the basic plot of *Fates* (“Welsh Literature—Prose—Sixth Article”). The events of *Book of the Three Dragons* appear in capsule form in Part 5 of “Theosophy in the Welsh Legends,” published in 1909—twenty-one years before the book appeared in print. There can be little doubt that Morris was attempting with both books to produce the “great epic” he had outlined so many years earlier.

Morris knew Welsh literature and history well, and he believed that the stories in the Mabinogi had originally been the sacred mystery tales of a Celtic druidic religion. As he says of the story of Pwyll and Rhianon, “It is the revelation of the divine to the personal principle in man; it is not, and does not pretend nor desire to be a love story” (*Fates* viii). Even a cursory reading of *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* proves Morris’s extensive knowledge of Welsh legend, folklore, and scholarship. He was so enamored of things Welsh that he chose to publish the book under his Welsh name—Cenydd Morus—although he dropped this affectation for *Book of the Three Dragons*. Perhaps “affectation” is too harsh: Morris was a Welsh-speaking Welshman (“Cymro Cymraeg”) and had every right to use the Welsh spelling of his name. However, his fondness for pseudonyms may have had more to do with this choice than any nationalistic fervor on his part.<sup>4</sup> In any case, using the Welsh spelling may have been a poor decision as far as marketing was concerned, since American readers would not have been familiar with Welsh orthography.

Very little scholarship on the Mabinogi existed at the time *Fates* appeared. Alfred Nutt had published his *Mabinogion Studies* in 1882, and in 1901 publisher David Nutt released a short monograph on the Mabinogi by Ivor B. John as Number 11 of Popular Studies in Mythology, Romance and Folklore. Scholarly journals had produced a few articles, but the largest compendium of Welsh scholarship available to Morris was Lady Charlotte Guest’s three-volume translation, which contained extensive notes. Morris makes his debt to Guest very clear in the preface to *Fates*. (In his theosophical articles he sometimes quotes from Sidney Lanier’s *The Boy’s Mabinogion* instead of from Guest.) The preface also mentions several ancient Welsh poets and manuscripts, as

well as a number of nineteenth-century scholars and poets, including the infamous creative scholar Iolo Morganwg. These early scholars believed the Four Branches were the remnants of a Celtic mythological cycle; Morganwg and his contemporaries were interested in reestablishing links to their mystic and mythological past, even if they had to invent those links themselves. Morris was aware of the doubtful historicity of Morganwg's material; he also knew the difference between "mabinogi" and "mabinogion." Clearly Morris had studied his subject closely before he came to America and had been deeply involved in the culture and intellectual life of Welsh-speaking Wales.

Given his sources and his immersion in theosophy, it is not surprising that Morris expounds the mythological theory of the Mabinogi's origins. As he states in the preface to *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed*:

It is certain that the Gods would have appeared in them [the Four Branches] originally; as the Gods appear in the Greek and Irish stories, or in the sagas of the North. It is certain that some of the characters in them, who appear now as mere men, were Gods when the stories were first told; the Children of Don, Gwydion and his brothers, are cognate with the children of Dana in Ireland, and were Gods as surely as were the latter. (viii)

Influenced by the theosophists' ideas about mythology, Morris stresses the connection between the Welsh tales and ancient religious ritual—a connection that imbues every action and event with mystic symbolism. There is a strong Jungian resonance in Morris's explanation of the tales' vitality and universality:

when they were first written, they were still near enough in spirit to that older time to carry with them some of its force; and because in that older time there did exist such a discipline, such a knowledge, such a purpose as we stand in need of now. The knowledge is the knowledge of the spiritual laws of life; the purpose is the purpose of the human soul on its evolutionary journey; the discipline is that discipline which tends to subject the brain-mind and animal man to the domination of the divine part of man, the deathless and birthless soul. (xiii)

As this passage indicates, theosophical teaching stresses that all of the stories in any culture's myths and legends are allegorical. The gods and heroes who inhabit these stories are spiritual archetypes, and their adventures recount the spiritual journey of the soul as it develops its inner divinity. Most of Morris's early articles on Welsh mythology concentrate on the allegorical significance contained in the tales of the Mabinogion. Pwyll, the hero of the Mabinogi in Morris's view, is much more than a main character:

Now the hero of this particular class of story always represents the personal man, ourselves as we find ourselves; with our divinity, the great soul at the back of our being, as yet undiscovered; and the quest that is laid before him, and the adventures that he meets by the way, are the cardinal fact, with its incidents, that comes sooner or later into all lives; the quest of quests, to come out from the personal life into life impersonal; to reach the true self; to obtain immortal wisdom and happiness. ("Theosophy in the Welsh Legends—II" 8)

Using these ideas as his starting point, Morris proceeds to reconstruct a fictional pantheon of Welsh gods, taken from legend, poetry, and folklore rather than limited to the Mabinogi. He also selects, rearranges, and adds to certain portions of the Mabinogi to create a story about the gods' attempt to raise a mortal—Pwyll—to the status of an immortal. However, the activities of the gods provide little more than a framework for retelling the First Branch of the Mabinogi. Morris extends the scenes of the story and adds new sections, but the basic plot is clearly a reworking of "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed."

*The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* is not a good book, nor does it appear to have been a popular one. After its initial publication in 1914, it disappeared until 1978, when Arno Press, a small publishing house in California, issued a paperback edition. Zahorski and Boyer mention seven complimentary reviews of the book, but as four of them appeared in either theosophical journals or Welsh-American newspapers (both had a distinct bias) and two were in local newspapers, few people could have read the reviews. Nor did the Aryan Theosophical Press have the effective marketing techniques or distribution system of a trade publisher.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his failure to find a popular reception, Morris returned to Welsh legend sixteen years later to create a children's book that was brought out by a major English and American publisher—Longmans, Green and Company (also Lady Charlotte Guest's publisher). Ella Young, a children's writer and fellow theosophist whom Morris had met at the Dublin lodge years earlier, persuaded her editor at Longmans to publish Morris's second book as a story for children. The manuscript had been substantially completed years earlier, but it had not been composed for children. Morris had doubts about the wisdom of publishing it for children, especially when the needs of a child audience prompted the editor to request major revisions. Morris had to ruthlessly lop off the final third of his manuscript to ensure that the book would not be too long for young readers. The final section of the manuscript has never been published.

*Book of the Three Dragons* is a large, attractive book, illustrated by Ferdinand Huszti Horvath, who must have immersed himself in Celtic

ideas before he began drawing, because he decorated his margins with Celtic knotwork and gave his dragons the heraldic, formal quality associated with the official Welsh dragon. Morris had minor complaints about the illustrations—including the dragons—but he was so relieved to have escaped the illustrating hand of Boris Artzybasheff that he kept most of his complaints to himself. Artzybasheff had illustrated some of Ella Young's books for children, and even though many people admired his work, Morris was not of their number.

*Book of the Three Dragons* begins with a summary of the events in the previous book, although nowhere does Morris refer to the earlier work. The gods, wishing to make Pwyll immortal, have put him through a series of trials, three of which he has failed. As the result of his failure, he is forced to wander the world as an amnesiac, the Nameless One with the Misfortunes, until a disguised Gwydion puts him through further trials that bring him to Cerridwen's Cauldron of Rebirth, from which he emerges as Manawydan. Although he has a new name, he now remembers his past as Pwyll and longs to return home to Dyfed. First, however, he must assist the other six Chief Chieftains of the Cymry in their mission to fetch the head of Bran the Blessed from the Isles of the Blessed—a mission that goes terribly wrong and leads Manawydan on three great adventures to undo the damage these human Chieftains have done to the gods.<sup>6</sup>

*Book of the Three Dragons* is not by any means a retelling of the Four Branches, but Morris does borrow a great deal from them. Besides characters' names and qualities, he retains certain plot elements and a narrative tone reminiscent of the original, and he even attempts to capture the linguistic structure of the Welsh source. A statement Morris makes in the preface of the earlier book could almost describe the second:

How far the story is taken from the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, and to what degree it has elected to go its own way, need not be enlarged on here. . . . Suffice it to say that from that source come the main framework of the plot, and, I hope, the whole spirit and atmosphere; and that there is a mint of phrases recurring through the chapters, which have been boldly lifted from Lady Guest's translation, and set in here without quotation marks, footnotes, or other acknowledgement. (*Fates* v)

Morris's main character is Manawydan, formerly Pwyll. There are references to his wife, Rhiannon, who is a goddess, and his son, Pryderi, both of whom are characters in the previous book, although neither of them appears in this volume. Morris gives an interesting twist to the

Four Branches by blending Pwyll and Manawydan into one character; in the medieval Welsh text Pwyll is Rhiannon's first husband and Manawydan her second. However, intriguing as the transformation is, Morris gives no reason for the change of name. The transformation scene itself has religious overtones and no doubt deep theosophical significance: the nameless wanderer who has been put through trials by the gods until he is at the point of death is immersed in the Cauldron of Rebirth and rises a new man, who yet retains all memory of his former life. If this is a religious rite, a new name is appropriate, but Morris makes no concessions to his presumed readership of children, few of whom are likely to be conversant with religious rituals of rebirth, theosophical ideas about reincarnation, or psychological theories of growth and development.

In the Mabinogi, Pwyll and Manawydan share few characteristics. Pwyll is impetuous and occasionally foolhardy; Manawydan is wise and cautious. Morris's Manawydan resembles his namesake closely, approaching every new situation with intelligence, caution, and determination. When a beautiful woman invites him to a feast on a magic island, Manawydan is properly circumspect: " 'There are and have been, feasts and feasts,' thought he; 'but not well to partake of some of them' " (*Three Dragons* 59). Throughout the novel, Manawydan never takes action without first pausing for thought, nor does he leave a job half done. When he applies himself to his crafts, he works at them until he has learned and perfected every possible aspect of each craft.

Other familiar names appear in *Book of the Three Dragons*: Gwydion, Aranrhod, and Math are gods, and Bran seems to be half divine and half human. A few of the minor characters, such as several of the Chief Chieftains of the Cymry, have Mabinogi names also. These names do not call attention to themselves or to their connections to the Mabinogi; other characters take precedence—characters whose names are drawn from Welsh folklore or other tales in the Mabinogion. Aranrhod has a minor role, and her character bears no resemblance to the Daughter of Don in the Fourth Branch.

Among the gods, only Gwydion and Math are recognizably similar to their originals. Math appears briefly, described as "Chief of the Ovates," because of his extensive knowledge of science and magic (25). Gwydion plays a larger role in the story, at least in the beginning. Disguised as a sharp-tongued and irritating harpist, he puts the Nameless One with the Misfortunes through the final trials that lead to rebirth as Manawydan. Later Gwydion hazards his magic wand and his own immortality on Manawydan's trustworthiness and determination. This in-

cident is the only suggestion of tension between Gwydion and Aranrhod, because it is her wheel of fate that demands Gwydion's sacrifice. However, Aranrhod is presented as totally impartial in all proceedings, never wishing anyone well or ill. She is more like one of the Greek Fates than the vengeful woman of the Fourth Branch. Gwydion is mentioned again as the best storyteller in the world, whose talents Manawydan acquires during a visit to the gods in which he passes another test.

Charles Sullivan III, one of the few scholars who has examined Morris's work, sees little resemblance between the Gwydion of the Fourth Branch and the divine being of Morris's book. In his Ph.D. dissertation, Sullivan writes, "As with the other immortals, Gwydion retains none of his earthly attributes in Morris' novel save his abilities as a story-teller" ("Influence" 61). Examined from another angle, however, the Gwydion of *Book of the Three Dragons* is very much like the Gwydion of the Mabinogi: a superb harpist and storyteller given to wearing magical disguises, who is loyal to those for whom he feels affection. In the Four Branches, Gwydion champions the causes of his brother Gilfaethwy and son/nephew Lleu Llaw Gyffes; in Morris's book he champions Manawydan, and indeed, the Welsh people as a whole. Morris's Gwydion is full of a Loki-like sense of mischief; he enjoys his trickery more than his original seems to, but the trickster character is obvious in both incarnations.

Unlike *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed*, which is an elaboration of the First Branch, *Book of the Three Dragons* merely borrows a few plot elements from the Mabinogi. The main subplots Morris uses are the Feast of the Head from the story of Branwen, and Manawydan's attempts at craft-making from the Third Branch. Although Morris ignores everything in the Second Branch that leads to the Feast of the Head, his account of the feast itself is similar to the original. Seven men carry the head of Bran the Blessed over the sea to Wales, where they spend some years feasting with it in Harlech and Gwales (in this case thirteen years rather than the original fourscore and seven). The three birds of Rhianon sing to them in Harlech. In both versions Bran warns the seven men not to open the third door of the royal palace in Gwales, and Heilyn son of Gwyn lets his curiosity get the better of him. One difference between the two accounts is that Morris stresses the prohibitive nature of Bran's warning against the third door, whereas in the medieval text the warning is more predictive. Another difference in Morris's tale is that this event is the beginning of the story rather than the end. Not only does sorrow fall upon the men, but two evil characters from Uffern (the Welsh underworld) sneak in and steal the magic breastplate and harp the gods

have loaned as a protection. After burying Bran's head in the White Mount in London, facing France, as the men are instructed to do in both versions, Morris's Manawydan spends the rest of the book attempting to win back the breastplate and harp.

The other major plot borrowing is linked to Manawydan's efforts to regain the magic items. In order to earn the loan of a minor god's magic gloves, Manawydan takes up the crafts of shoemaking, shieldmaking, and swordmaking, in that order. In the medieval text, the crafts involved are saddlemaking, shieldmaking, and shoemaking, and Manawydan and Pryderi's efforts at these crafts are a matter of economic survival rather than an attempt to earn something from someone else. Morris retains but refashions the jealousy of the other craftsmen; rather than plotting to kill Manawydan, the other men wish to kill the master craftsmen from whom Manawydan learns his various arts. In both cases, Manawydan produces items that are without peer:

Then Manawyddan<sup>7</sup> took himself to making shoes, and they were the best in the universe. He would make none but with leather of Spain or even Africa, after its magical steeping in a caldron [*sic*] for over a hundred years. The commonest nails he would nail them with were of gold of Arabia; and he would face and pattern the leather with gold and with blue enamel. (114)

This is an elaboration of the original, which had no magical ingredients:

And then he began to buy to buy the finest cordwain he found in the town, and no other leather than that would he buy except leather for the soles; and he began to associate with the best goldsmith in the town, and had buckles made for the shoes, and the buckles gilded, and he looked on at that himself until he had learnt it. (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 45)

Similarly, Manawydan takes pains with his shields:

Manawyddan took himself earnestly to making shields. . . . He made the frames of strong withies, and over every withy sang its spell. He covered them with leather of Spain, or Africa, after its soaking two hundred years in waters of magic. He adorned them, according to his learning, with gold of Arabia in enchanted patterns and with blue enamel. (*Three Dragons* 118–19)

The references to blue enamel hearken back to the saddlemaking in the Third Branch; Manawydan and Pryderi use blue-azure on their saddles—a technique they learned from Llasar Llaes Gyfnawid (the supernatural emigrant who brought the Cauldron of Rebirth from Ireland in “Branwen”).



In addition to characters and plot, Morris also adopts the structure of the Mabinogi at times. The Four Branches are not self-important tales; they are fast-paced and full of action and dialogue. As Bedwyr Lewis Jones points out, the Mabinogi consists of short dramatic scenes of which up to fifty percent is dialogue ("Gladly Would We Have a Tale" 24–26). *Book of the Three Dragons* also consists of short dramatic scenes with an abundance of dialogue. Of course, there is no way to prove that Morris consciously borrowed this structure from the Mabinogi. A similar dramatic structure occurs in many other works, particularly in modern fiction. Nevertheless, there is plenty of internal evidence, as well as Morris's own acknowledgement in *Fates*, that he studied Guest's translation carefully, and he may well have been influenced by the structure of the tales in her work.

A more obvious structural borrowing is Morris's use of branches in organizing his story. After a preliminary section that recapitulates the events of *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed*, the balance of the book divides into four branches. The first section, which summarizes previous events, is introduced as "Here is the Bringing-In of the Book of the Three Dragons" and contains two chapters. The next section begins "Here is the First Branch of it, Namely the Wyddfa Mountain"; there are four numbered chapters in this part. This is followed by a section containing three chapters: "Here now is the Second Branch of it, called: The Service of Plenydd Splendid, and the Wars of Manawyddan Against Tathal Twyll Goleu." Apparently Morris was unable to arrange his final two branches as generic wholes, for following his second branch, he begins the fourth: "Here is the Beginning of the Fourth Branch of it, Which is Called: The Service of Alawn Alawon, and the Contests of Manawyddan Against the Thief of the Sea." There is only one chapter of the fourth section before Morris turns to the third: "Here is the Third Branch of it Now, Namely: The Gloves and the Service of Gwron Gawr, and Gwron Gawr Himself." After three chapters dealing with craft-making and battles with a dragon, Morris returns to his fourth branch for the final three chapters of the book: "Here is the Rest of the Fourth Branch of it, Namely: The Service of Alawn Alawon, and the Contests of Manawyddan against the Thief of the Sea." Despite considerable organizational difficulties, Morris forces his material into these four branches, obviously a conscious decision to use the Mabinogi as a model. He used a similar structure for *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* and it proved equally unworkable, since the material he added to the tale changed its shape drastically. Manipulating his Table of Contents into this forced arrangement of branches creates unnecessary confusion and

awkwardness. The story flows naturally from chapter to chapter, and a simple list of chapter titles would have been a better arrangement.

Morris does not seem to grasp the internal structure of his source. As a number of Celtic scholars have shown, the Mabinogi has a tightly interlaced internal structure based on thematic parallels and triple groupings of plot elements.<sup>8</sup> While he does use a triple arrangement for such things as Manawydan's three adventures and three crafts, as well as three dragons and the Three Primitive Bards, Morris does not borrow the sophisticated technique that interweaves the various strands into an indivisible whole without infringing on the autonomy of each branch. Morris's triple groupings have more in common with Western folktales' tendency to arrange items in threes than with the complex circilinear structure adopted by the anonymous redactor of the medieval text. By borrowing only the surface structure of the Four Branches, Morris commits himself to an arrangement that does not suit his work.

In both of his books, Morris's use of language reflects an intent to recapture the tone and inflections of his source. However, *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* concentrates on Aryan theology and theosophical interpretations, which do not lend themselves to lightheartedness and humor. Although Morris injects some humor into *Fates*, it is almost drowned in the formal diction of high fantasy. In the second book, on the other hand, Morris is not so heavy-handed with his material. Rather than concentrating on building a pantheon of Welsh gods, he wants to tell an adventure story. In the medieval texts the tone of the Mabinogi is often lighthearted, and it is spiced with understated humor reminiscent of modern Irish conversational techniques. Morris occasionally adopts a similar tone in *Book of the Three Dragons*. When the disguised Gwydion is testing the Nameless One with the Misfortunes, they hire a ferryman to take them to the Isle of Mon, and Gwydion's irrational behavior creates difficulty:

"Dear help thee better!" he cried, leaping to his feet, "behold yonder!" What was there to behold, none was to know: for no man may leap to his feet in a coracle without overturning it. The three of them were in the water; the ferryman swimming back towards Arfon, and pushing his boat before him as he swam. (10)

This passage is a reworking of the same event in *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* and demonstrates a change and maturation in Morris's style. In the earlier account, there is no mystery and little humor: Gwydion stands up on the edge of the coracle because of his excitement at sighting the oldest salmon in the world. Morris develops the comic po-

tential in the scene for the later work, placing the comment about the nature of coracles where it has the greatest comic impact and removing the reference to the salmon, which detracts from the effect.

Most of the humor in the book depends on characterization like that of Gwydion as a mad bard. Gwiawn Llygad Cath, the Sea-Thief (Gwiawn Cat's Eye), provides considerable humor through his inability to resist stealing objects of value. Morris describes the first encounter between Gwiawn and Manawydan from Gwiawn's viewpoint:

"Well, well," thought Gwiawn at last; "whether that be the famous breastplate or no, it would be imprudent to leave it unstolen." He was bred in economy—richly gifted in prudence. (83)

Because of his weakness, Gwiawn eventually is forced to surrender to Manawydan, who magically strips him of his thieving nature, but his character continues to provide humor as he follows Manawydan helplessly through the underworld facing dangerous enchantments.

The sorceress Ewinwen is not as humorous as Gwiawn, but her situation provides considerable entertainment as she continually attempts to enchant Manawydan but instead falls under the enchantment of his storytelling. Sometimes the humor is at Manawydan's expense, as in his treatment at the hands of the various masters from whom he learns his crafts, or in Gwron Gawr's apparent rejection of the shoes and shield he has set Manawydan to making. Occasionally there is unintentional humor at Morris's expense, usually when he takes himself or his material too seriously. For example, he says of the gods, "By virtue of their Godhood, they were all Institutional Bards" (25). Although the Welsh take their poets seriously even today, the juxtaposition of godhood and membership in a professional organization is mirth provoking. Elsewhere Manawydan himself becomes an Institutional Bard by virtue of his visit to the Wyddfa Mountain—the Mount Olympus of Morris's Welsh gods (known as Mount Snowdon to modern tourists). Morris repeats a folk belief still current in parts of Wales—the belief that any person who spends the night on a certain mountain will wake up either mad or a poet. In Manawydan's case, the experience transforms him into an Institutional Bard. Manawydan's sudden acquisition of godlike bardic abilities contains an accidentally humorous twist in the image of the new bard standing before a mountain cave reverently munching the Hazelnuts of Long Nourishment. On the other hand, unintentional humor is hard to prove, especially when the author in question has been known to use pseudonyms like Aubrey Tyndall Bloggsleigh and Floyd C. Egbert. Morris may well have been cognizant of the humor in these passages.

Despite occasional lapses, the humor in *Book of the Three Dragons* works well for the most part. However, Morris's attempt to borrow a Welsh turn of phrase is not as successful. The few Welsh words and phrases he employs add an exotic touch to the story, but Morris's attempts to render English in a Welsh linguistic pattern create a great deal of awkwardness. Gwydion's exclamation, "Dear help thee better!" quoted earlier, makes no sense to a modern reader. The following passage, in which Gwydion risks his immortality, exhibits some of Morris's worst excesses:

There was consternation with the younger Gods at that. "Run you never this risk!" said they. "Serviceable is that wand of yours; delightful is your presence here in the Wyddfa. Long mourning would be for the Island of the Mighty, Gods and men, were you to lose your immortality and your godhood." (31)

Standard Welsh sentence structure is Verb-Subject-Object; Morris tends to use the structure known as the "emphatic sentence," which places the object in the initial position. This inverted structure is normally used for emphasis, and some of its effect is lost when the emphatic sentence is overused, especially in a foreign language. Instead of adding force, this use of language has a ludic effect similar to Pennsylvania Dutch phraseology (e.g., "Throw the cow over the fence some hay").

Science fiction and fantasy critics are strong admirers of Morris's style, finding it ideal for its subject matter.<sup>9</sup> Zahorski and Boyer, for instance, enthuse over Morris's "outstanding talent as a prose stylist" (195) and make great claims for his use of compound adjectives, syntactic parallelism, and rhetorical balance (195–203). Ursula K. Le Guin admires the humor in *Three Dragons*:

I think Morris and James Branch Cabell were the masters of the comic-heroic. . . . They achieve their comedy essentially by their style: by an eloquence, a fertility and felicity and ferocity of invention that is simply over-whelming. They are outrageous, and they know exactly what they're doing. (91)

If Le Guin's analysis is correct, the effect of Morris's emphatic sentences was intentional. However, even intentional effects can become excessive.

*Three Dragons* is a more polished work than *Fates*, but in terms of sophistication of content there is not much difference between the two books. Yet *Fates* is an adult book and *Three Dragons* is intended for children. The difference may be due to a marketing decision. The Theosophical Society apparently put little thought into marketing *Fates*,

but two of the independent reviews (that is, those in nontheosophical publications) commented on its suitability for children.<sup>10</sup> These reviews may have influenced Longmans's decision to aim the later work at young readers. Since Longmans was a major publisher, reviews for *Three Dragons* appeared in the New York newspapers, invariably in the lists of children's books. Doubtless Longmans timed publication for the Christmas season: the reviews are dated mid-November to early December 1930 (Zahorski and Boyer 258–59). In *Three Dragons* itself, the only noticeable concession to a young audience is in the front matter: A Key to Pronunciation, the tone and language level of which differ markedly from the scholarly preface to *Fates*.

*Book of the Three Dragons* is not a landmark in the history of children's literature. Its ideal reader would be a preternaturally intellectual child with a penchant for mythology and fantasy. Such children do exist—Ursula K. Le Guin was one of them—but I doubt they make up a large readership. The book's importance rests on the fact that it is the first work of creative fiction for children based on the Mabinogi. Few people have heard of it; fewer have read it. Although Arno Press republished it in 1978, the book is once again out of print. Readers interested in the book must haunt secondhand bookstores and special collections at research libraries.

One unique aspect of the book deserves mention: a Welshman wrote it. Even though the Mabinogi is itself Welsh, few native prose writers have drawn inspiration from it.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the legends are too familiar to the Welsh; only an exile like Morris, an Englishman like Alan Garner, or an American like Lloyd Alexander can sense the Otherness that makes the Mabinogi such an ideal source for fantasy.

## NOTES

1. Evangeline Walton eventually published four volumes based on the Mabinogi, one for each branch. In 1970 Ballantine republished *The Virgin and the Swine* in paperback as *The Island of the Mighty*, and followed it with three original paperback publications: *The Children of Llyr* (1971), which retold the Second Branch; *The Song of Rhiannon* (1972), which retold the Third Branch; and *Prince of Annwn* (1974), which dealt with the First Branch. For a discussion of Walton's work, see Sullivan, *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy*; Zahorski and Boyer, *Lloyd Alexander, Evangeline Walton Ensley, Kenneth Morris: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography*; also Sullivan's Ph.D. dissertation, "The Influence of Celtic Myth and Legend on Modern Imaginative Fiction."

2. Lloyd Alexander vaguely remembers reading *Book of the Three Dragons* some years before he began work on the *Chronicles of Prydain*, but he does not believe the book influenced him in any way. Alexander also read *The Boy's*

*Mabinogion*, which had a slight influence, in that it convinced him he could do a much better job than Lanier of retelling the Welsh legends (personal interview).

3. In 1906 Charles W. Leadbeater, a prominent and influential member of Besant's London Lodge, was accused of improper conduct with the boys under his care. Although a question remains as to whether Leadbeater was a pedophile or merely had enlightened views about masturbation, there was enough evidence to expel him from the Society. Within a year and a half, Leadbeater was readmitted to membership. In 1909 Leadbeater claimed that a young Indian member of the Society was destined to be the next messiah, or World Teacher. Leadbeater took the boy under his wing and founded a church around him with Annie Besant's full support, despite continual charges of sexual perversion against Leadbeater and other priests of the new church. When the boy failed to develop into the promised messiah, and in fact turned against the Theosophical Society some years later, the Society lost a third of its members. See Campbell, Chapter 5.

4. Zahorski and Boyer list twenty pseudonyms, most of them used only once. Although Morris used his real name for poetry and scholarly articles, almost all of his fiction was published under various pen names. Only in his final years did Morris publish fiction under his own name.

5. Nowadays the Theosophical Press maintains a presence on the World Wide Web, so its publications are more widely advertised and more easily available to interested readers. However, most of the publications are reprints of books and pamphlets written by the original leaders of the society; there is little fiction on the list.

6. Morris elaborates on the theosophical importance of "the Wonderful Head" in Part 1 of "Theosophy in the Welsh Legends," linking Bran the Blessed to Uther Pendragon. The latter's name, says Morris, comes from "uthr" ("wonderful") "Ben Ddraig" ("dragon head") and signifies the Eternal Spirit called the Macroprosopos (8–9).

7. Morris's spelling of the Welsh names often differs from that in the Jones and Jones Everyman edition. These variant spellings are not typographical errors.

8. See, for example, Bollard, "The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*,"; also Gantz, "Thematic Structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi."

9. Dainis Bisenieks has written several critical appreciations of Morris. See "Welsh Myth in Modern American Fantasy" and "Finder of the Welsh Gods."

10. E. H. Clough's review in the *San Diego Union* and an anonymous reviewer in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, both reprinted in *Theosophical Path*, January 1915 and December 1916, respectively (quoted in Zahorski and Boyer 253–54).

11. I mention "prose" specifically, because Welsh poets and musicians have always mined the legends for material. I speak only for children's fiction when I state that foreign writers have made more use of the Mabinogi than have Welsh writers.

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## *Chapter 4*

# *Alan Garner's The Owl Service*

In the thirty-four years following the publication of Kenneth Morris's *Book of the Three Dragons*, authors of children's books made little use of the Mabinogi. Other than several school readers, which were textbooks rather than literature, there is little evidence that children's writers were aware of the Welsh legends. However, these years did see the publication of Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones's Everyman translation for adults (1949) and Gwyn Jones's retelling for children in *Welsh Legends and Folk-Tales* (1955), as well as several lesser collections. In creative fiction, on the other hand, the Mabinogi lay forgotten for three decades until Lloyd Alexander and Alan Garner rediscovered it simultaneously on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Alexander was the first to publish the results of his discovery: *The Book of Three*, volume one of the Chronicles of Prydain, appeared in America in 1964, *The Black Cauldron* in 1965, and *The Castle of Llyr* in 1966. Alan Garner's *The*



*Owl Service* came out in Britain in 1967, the same year that saw publication in America of Alexander's *Taran Wanderer*, volume four of the *Chronicles of Prydain*.

During an interview with the Garners, Griselda Garner, who is closely involved in her husband's work, stated that he was the first of many children's writers to draw upon the Mabinogi, or indeed, upon Welsh traditional material in general.<sup>1</sup> Since three of Alexander's volumes had already appeared, this statement is inaccurate; however, only *The Black Cauldron* was available in Britain before 1967, and it does not seem to have made much of an impact on that country.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Garner had been researching his material since 1963, so Griselda Garner's claim may certainly hold true for Britain.

That two outstanding creative artists should rediscover the Mabinogi at virtually the same time was no accident. Garner and Alexander were both resonating to the music of Robert Graves, a much admired English-Irish poet and novelist who had become obsessed with Welsh myth. Graves's *The White Goddess*, first published in 1948, was subtitled *A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* and purported to reconstruct an ancient druidic tree alphabet cum sacred calendar, which had been encoded in old Welsh poetry. Although *The White Goddess* devotes many pages to deciphering the druidic secrets, its main thesis is that all poetry ultimately derives from worship of an ancient moon goddess—a triple goddess consisting of a maiden, an adult woman, and an old hag. According to Graves, this matriarchal religion predates all religions that worship male deities. Poetic myth concerns itself with the ritual seasonal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth through the figures of the white goddess and the two male rivals for her affection, whom Graves calls the God of the Waxing Year and the God of the Waning Year. In her triple aspect, the goddess is both bride and mother, inspiration and doom. For Graves, this is the basis of all true poetry.

Graves had been reading the Mabinogion when he experienced his startling epiphany regarding the hidden druidic lore. Not surprisingly, then, *The White Goddess* culls most of its material from Welsh sources. Lady Charlotte Guest's scholarly footnotes leave a clear footprint on the book, but other Welsh sources and scholarly commentary leave their mark as well. Graves had read everything available on early Welsh literature. The Welsh material fit Graves's thesis well, because the ancient Celts worshipped various triple goddesses, some of whom are often identified with characters in the Mabinogi—Branwen, Rhiannon, Aranrhod, Blodeuwedd. Graves also drew upon his extensive knowledge of Greek and Egyptian myth to show how all ancient mythologies hearken

back to the worship of the triple goddess. (The theosophists would have loved this book.)

Despite his scholarly intent for *The White Goddess*, Graves was gravely disappointed when the book was loudly ignored by Celtic scholars, whose underlying and unspoken assessment was that the poet was some kind of fruitcake. Other writers, however, especially other poets, found the work both challenging and inspirational. It demanded an intuitive understanding rather than a rational, logical approach; readers whose thought processes ran in a straight line were perplexed and uncomprehending. As long-time admirers of Graves's poetry and fiction, Garner and Alexander persevered with *The White Goddess* and were rewarded with inspiration. Garner even wrote to Graves in Majorca and received a friendly reply.

Graves's celebration of the white goddess predates the recent feminist interest in uncovering a history of matriarchal religion and reestablishing a consciousness of a mother goddess. However, the poet's feelings towards his goddess muse were sharply ambivalent—fear, hate, love, admiration all intermingled. It is not surprising that his passionate outpourings in *The White Goddess* should so strongly influence Garner, whose own experience of female power had left him with a similar ambivalence towards women, especially towards mother figures. In Garner's books mothers were transformed into powerful mythological forces, and every female character shared at least one aspect of the triple goddess. Nowhere is the figure of the triple goddess more clearly delineated than in Garner's fourth novel, *The Owl Service*.

*The Owl Service* is a reworking of part of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi: the tragedy of Lleu Llaw Gyffes and Blodeuwedd, the woman made of flowers. By winning both the *Guardian* Award and the Carnegie Medal, *The Owl Service* drew attention to the Mabinogi as a rich source of material for writers and paved the way for award-winning books by Susan Cooper, Nancy Bond, and Jenny Nimmo, all of them indebted to Welsh traditional materials and to Alan Garner for leading the way.

Alan Garner is not an easy act to follow. Jenny Nimmo, for one, is grateful that she did not read *The Owl Service* before she wrote *The Snow Spider*, the first book in her Welsh trilogy.<sup>3</sup> Like many other children's writers, she has great respect for Garner's talents and achievements. His novels are multilayered, carefully crafted, psychologically truthful works. He himself compares them to onions: "An onion can be peeled down through its layers, but it is always, at every layer, an onion, whole in itself. I try to write onions" ("A Bit More Practice" 577).

Garner puts a great deal of work into each "onion." First he invests several years in intensive research, then he puts the research aside and writes the book intuitively, allowing his instinct and intellect to balance each other in an extended act of creative craftsmanship. By his own reckoning, he spent four years researching *The Owl Service*: detailed scholarly research combined with very practical participation in modern Welsh culture and language. Yet the finished product shows no sign of his extensive background work; it is a concise, polished, and profound piece of literature—layers of psychological realism presented in the guise of fantasy.

Garner's previous novels had also been fantasies—a remarkable achievement for a man who claims to have no imagination whatsoever. The first two books, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963), are standard representatives of the fantasy genre, although the latter shows signs of the emotional and psychological depth to come, despite its false ending.<sup>4</sup> The true breakthrough, however, came with *Elidor* (1965), in which Garner first made use of the electromagnetic imagery that would play such an important part in *The Owl Service* and *Red Shift*. *Elidor* is a disconcerting book; the usual dualistic poles of Good versus Evil, White versus Black, merge inexorably into shades of gray, and the land of Elidor emerges as a psychic parasite of our own world rather than as a magical and virtuous other-world. According to Garner, he was deep into his research for *The Owl Service* when the idea for *Elidor* appeared and insisted on being written, first as a radio play, and then extended into novel form.

In *A Fine Anger*, a critical monograph on Garner, Neil Philip stresses the "intensely autobiographical" nature of Garner's works (9) and states that "every book is a comment on and refinement of its predecessors" (21). Since all of Garner's books are steps in his own maturation, therefore, *Elidor* must have been a necessary bridge between the two earlier books and the powerful novels to follow. In fact, the two poles that make up the dichotomy in Garner's own life and maintain the creative tension in his work were approaching each other book by book until they came into direct and destructive contact in *The Owl Service* and *Red Shift* and later found peace and resolution in *The Stone Book Quartet*.

In a paper delivered at the international conference of the Soviet Writers' Union in November 1989, Garner speaks of his difficulties in reconciling his elite intellectual training and his folk roots:

To become a whole, mature human being, I had to integrate my divided self. I am making the story too simple. But, unless you are English, and aware of the subtle cruelties of the English class system, you will not understand the com-

plexity of my distress. It was an anger, a sense of outrage, at once personal, social, political, philosophical and linguistic. ("Beyond the Tenth Kingdom" 2)

*The Owl Service*, then, represents the height of Alan Garner's own conflict between his working-class heritage and his elite academic training, between his intuitive nonrational self and his intellect—a conflict seeking resolution but not yet resolved. It is not surprising, therefore, that the same conflicts appear in the book. In fact, Garner was drawn to the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes and Blodeuwedd because it was a parable of those same conflicts. Writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* soon after the publication of the book, he said of the legend that "it struck me as being such a modern story of the damage people do to each other, not through evil in themselves, but through the unhappy combination of circumstance that throws otherwise harmless personalities together" ("A Bit More Practice" 577). Not coincidentally, the story of Blodeuwedd figures prominently in *The White Goddess*.

Garner had found occasion to use the Mabinogi as a source long before he wrote *The Owl Service*. All of his earlier works draw heavily on myth and legend for characters, plot, and theme. No particular mythology is favored over another: Garner mixes elements from Norse, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, English, and Greek myth, as well as drawing from folklore and traditional ballad. The Four Branches are a minor source in the first two books, although the other tales in the Mabinogion provide a number of names. For example, the wizard Cadellin in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomerath* gets his name from the early Arthurian tale "Culhwch and Olwen." The footnotes in Lady Charlotte Guest's three-volume translation of the Mabinogion are also a rich source of names and stories: the sword Dyrnwyn, for instance, and the horse Melynlas, both of which were also borrowed by Lloyd Alexander. However, almost all the Welsh elements in Garner's first three books can be found more readily in Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, which greatly influenced Garner's poetic imagination.

One element that may be drawn from the Mabinogi is the description of the Morrigan's hounds in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. In the First Branch of the Mabinogi, Pwyll encounters the hounds of Annwn, which are white with red ears and glow with luminescence. The Morrigan's dogs are even more unearthly, as the first appearance of one of them indicates:

It was very like a bull-terrier; except that it stood four feet high at the shoulder, and its ears, unlike the rest of the white body, were covered in coarse red hair.

But what set it apart from all others was the fact that, from pointed ears to curling lip, its head and muzzle were blank. There were no eyes. (*Weirdstone* 93)

There seems to be no unified purpose in Garner's use of the Welsh material in the early novels. Writing about *The Moon of Gomerath*, Neil Philip remarks,

The original context of these words, phrases and incidents, beyond their Celtic nature and magical significance, is of little importance to their function in Garner's book. They serve, like the names and the spells, to give authenticity to feeling and mood rather than any specific purpose. (40)

Whereas Garner's first three novels used only random borrowings from the Mabinogi, *The Owl Service* is constructed almost entirely of bricks from that source, specifically from the tale of Blodeuwedd. Blodeuwedd is the woman made of flowers who is turned into an owl for betraying her husband, Lleu Llaw Gyffes. In *The Owl Service* Garner uses this tale to examine the relationships of three contemporary adolescents. Even a cursory reading makes it clear that the book is indebted to the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi for its story line, but what is not so obvious is that Garner has borrowed much more from his Welsh source than its plot: he has adopted its structure, its geography, its characters, and its themes, as well as many images and concepts.<sup>5</sup>

*The Owl Service* is the story of three adolescents who are spending the summer holiday in an isolated Welsh valley: Alison; her stepbrother, Roger; and Gwyn, the housekeeper's son. Alison and Roger are upper-class English teenagers, while Gwyn is looked down upon as a Welsh bastard. When Alison and Gwyn find a floral-patterned dinner service in the loft above her room, Alison feels compelled to trace the pattern from the plates to make paper owls. Strange things begin to happen: the pattern disappears from the plates, there are odd noises in the loft, and an unexplained pressure starts to build up in the valley. The three teenagers learn from Huw Halfbacon, the half-mad handyman, that in this very valley Gwydion and Math created a woman made of flowers and that this act and the resulting tragedy released an uncontrolled power in the valley that demands a ritual reenactment of the myth in every generation. Because previous generations had attempted unsuccessfully to channel this power into the dinner service and a life-sized portrait of Blodeuwedd, the current generation must deal with the full destructive force that has built up over the years. As the tensions mount, Alison, Gwyn, and Roger find themselves forced to act out the passions of Blodeuwedd, Lleu Llaw Gyffes, and Gronw Bebyr.

The plot of *The Owl Service* is actually tripartite. Besides the story of the mythological characters and that of the modern adolescents, the story of the previous generation slowly comes to light. Huw Halfbacon played the part of Lleu in that enactment, while Gwyn's mother Nancy was Blodeuwedd. Alison's distant cousin Bertram was killed in his role as Gronw.

Garner has borrowed the concept of a tripartite plot from the Mabinogi. Each branch of the Mabinogi contains three interlocked tales. In the Fourth Branch, one strand of the story concerns Gwydion's complicity in the death of Pryderi and the rape of Goewin and his resulting punishment. The second strand is about Lleu's boyhood and Gwydion's attempts to trick Lleu's mother, Aranrhod, into giving the boy a name and arms. The third tale is that of Blodeuwedd. Jeffrey Gantz sees in these tales cycles of lust and betrayal in which each event leads to a chain of other events ("Thematic Structure" 252). The three triangles of *The Owl Service* can be seen as similar cycles or perhaps as a continuation of the chain of events that began in the Fourth Branch.

Another structural device that Garner borrows from his Welsh source is the practice of weaving the three strands of story into an intricate interlace. Just as Celtic art is known for its interlace design, so too does much of its narrative literature weave strands of story together. J. K. Bollard points out that the Mabinogi has a definite and distinct interlace structure: "The events of one episode are made clear by comparison with other similar but different episodes" (69-70). This sounds much like Carolyn Gillies's comment about *The Owl Service*'s "complex structure that can finally be reduced to a series of interlocking triangles, rather like a mathematical puzzle" (107).

In *The Owl Service* Garner maintains his contemporary story as the main strand, but the other two stories weave in and out almost as if they are conjured up by events in the present. At the exact moment that Gwyn lays hands on the dinner service and experiences a moment of severe disorientation, Roger has a startling experience by the river: "Something flew by him, a blink of dark on the leaves. It was heavy, and fast, and struck hard. He felt the vibration through the rock, and he heard a scream" (11). What Roger has experienced is the impact of Lleu's spear and Gronw Bebyr's death cry, although Roger does not realize it at the time.

Sometimes all three strands appear at once, as when Gwyn waits in the dark for Alison:

His concentration was broken once, when he was alarmed by the quick drumming of hoofs, but the next moment he grinned as a motorcycle swept along the road. Its headlamp spun shadows in his face. (59)

Gwyn does not realize that he has just heard Lleu Llaw Gyffes galloping home (or possibly Gronw Bebyr riding out to hunt) and seen Bertram riding the vintage motorcycle on which he was killed. Throughout the novel Bertram's presence is indicated by the sound of the motorcycle and the smell of petrol, and Lleu is represented by hoofbeats and the smell of goat. Blodeuwedd herself appears as a wall painting that has been plastered over, a reflection in the fish pond, a shape in the night, the flowers from which she was created, and always as owls.

This kind of structural borrowing may be a practice already familiar to Garner. Writing about the earlier novels, Neil Philip says, "I suspect that in both *The Weirdstone* and its sequel Garner was seeking to emulate the structural effects he found in the Celtic stories which also supplied him with a language and a frame of reference" (24). Triple groupings have powerful connotations in Western cultures. Our folktales contain such groupings: the king has three sons, the hero must accomplish three tasks or answer three questions, ritual phrases are repeated three times. Western Christianity celebrates the Holy Trinity. Even in modern times we continue to think in threes, so that pilots make three-point landings and ministers write three-point sermons. The tripartite structure Garner borrowed from the Four Branches reverberates with echoes from these other triple groupings.

On another level, Garner's style may also have been influenced by his source. Like Kenneth Morris, Garner uses the kind of short dramatic scenes Bedwyr Lewis Jones finds in the Mabinogi ("Gladly Would We Have a Tale" 26). Garner depends even more on dialogue than does his source; up to two-thirds of *The Owl Service* is dialogue as opposed to the fifty percent Jones sees in the Four Branches. However, Garner's style is more likely due to his television training than to his source; at any rate, he attributes the style to his work in television ("Coming to Terms" 23), although there may have been an intuitive recognition of the stylistic similarities. Some critics feel that the dialogue is a major weakness in the book, accusing it of being cliché-ridden. Eleanor Cameron, for instance, refers to "this TV type of dialogue" and claims "it is the staccato beat of the dialogue which may give the effect of choppiness rather than the progression of the action" (432). However, rather than creating choppiness, the dialogue increases the pace of the story and the buildup of tension; it is an effective narrative device in a novel such as this.

The Welsh valley in which Garner sets his story is Llanymawddwy, an actual place he knew intimately through his own visits and long discussions with the local inhabitants. All of the places Garner uses in his fiction are real places in every detail, down to the names of the streets and houses and local landmarks. Critics and reviewers continually remark upon his sense of place. Garner feels that geographical reality is extremely important in fiction, particularly in fantasy:

For example, if we are in Eldorado and we find a mandrake, then OK, so it's a mandrake: in Eldorado anything goes. But, by force of imagination, compel the reader to believe that there is a mandrake in a garden in Mayfield Road, Ulverston, Lancashire, then when you pull up that mandrake it is really going to scream; and possibly the reader will, too. ("Real Mandrakes" 591)

From comments Garner has made in interviews, scholars have mistakenly concluded that he believed Llanymawddwy to be the actual site of the events in the Fourth Branch, even though scholarship has located the sites elsewhere. Welsh scholars have been pointing out Garner's presumed error for years, most recently Peter J. Foss in an article for *The New Welsh Review* (Spring 1990). Garner is fully cognizant of Welsh geography; he is well aware of the locations pinpointed by scholars as the sites of the events recounted in the Mabinogi. However, Garner needs natural and man-made objects on which to construct his novels—a need that may be a strength or a weakness—and the house he uses in *The Owl Service* exists in Llanymawddwy. As he explains his choice of setting, "I went to this house by accident—seeming accident—and the house was artistically correct. And I thought, it's more important to get it artistically right than historically right. So I made that decision."

Garner's choice of Llanymawddwy is also a visceral one; for him the valley is almost an archetype. His stance is philosophical: all time is one time and all places are one place. What is more, the inhabitants have folk memories of the legend of Lleu Llaw Gyffes and have localized many of the events in place names. Garner also points out that the tales existed long before they were written down in the form we now have them; whoever recorded the stories may well have localized the events himself.

For Garner, it is enough that the tragedy *could* have occurred in Llanymawddwy. From Dafydd Rees, the man on whom Huw Halfbacon is modeled, Garner learned the local tales and the related names of topical features in the landscape. This inside information is woven into Garner's story and adds texture, depth, and verisimilitude. *The Owl Service* also captures the brooding, claustrophobic atmosphere of the



Welsh valleys, surrounded on all sides by encroaching mountains and above by lowering clouds. Roads are narrow and winding and often bordered on both sides by tall hedges. It is easy to feel trapped in a Welsh valley. Garner expresses this atmosphere brilliantly; in fact, he has a better sense of Welsh place than writers who are native to Wales.

Besides borrowing plot, structure, and setting from the Mabinogi, Garner also borrows characters. Blodeuwedd, Llew, and Gronw Bebyr do not only appear as ghostly presences, but in many ways they *are* Alison, Gwyn, and Roger. Nancy, Gwyn's mother, has been Blodeuwedd in the past; now she has become Aranrhod, Llew's mother. Aranrhod is never mentioned by name, but the relationship between Gwyn and Nancy makes the identification clear. As Gwyn tells Alison, "She hates my guts" (91). Critics familiar with Garner's source have also pointed out the connection (e.g., Philip 67). Likewise Huw is no longer Llew, but Gwydion. Huw explains his nickname of Halfbacon to Roger by telling how he tricked a man out of some pigs by conjuring up twelve horses and twelve hounds; this, of course, is how Gwydion tricked Pryderi. As Neil Philip points out in *A Fine Anger*, Halfbacon is also one of Gwydion's nicknames (67). Huw also turns out to be Gwyn's father, as Gwydion is Llew's; and Huw tracks Gwyn down when he runs away from Alison's betrayal, finding him in an oak tree where he has been chased by a black sow, just as Gwydion found the transformed Llew in a tree with a sow at its foot. Since Huw is the hereditary lord of the valley, Gwyn is the heir apparent, descended from Gwydion and Llew and destined to become Llew as were his forebears before him.

Garner draws the parallels in painstaking detail. Just as Gwydion transforms Blodeuwedd into an owl, so Huw transforms Alison by giving her Gwyn's gift of a slate pendant. Huw, like Gwydion, has the help of local farmers in tracking down his missing son. When Huw reaches the tree in which Gwyn has taken refuge, he is humming "a kind of song" (130); this is the equivalent of the three englynys (a type of short Welsh poem) Gwydion sings to coax the eagle/Llew out of his tree. Garner does not go so far as to transform Gwyn into an eagle (although he indulges in a subtle pun by having Gwyn "spread-eagled" on a cliff), but he represents the transformation linguistically, as he explained in an interview:

In the Mabinogion there is the period when Llew is killed and turned into an eagle. If you match that with the text of *The Owl Service*, the name of "Gwyn" is never mentioned: it is always "he," until the very moment when Huw makes him confront his destiny by reaching into the mountain and pulling out the talismans again. And after page on page on page of "he," it's " 'Mister Huw, I'm sorry,'

said Gwyn." And then the eagle is Lleu again. . . . From the point of being "killed" by Roger's verbal cruelty to accepting his destiny, he is not referred to by the narrator as "Gwyn," but as "he."

Blodeuwedd is the pivotal character in *The Owl Service*, whether as ghostly presence, as Nancy, or as Alison. Her actions determine the course of future events, not by controlling them but by setting loose uncontrollable passions. When Alison looks at the pattern on the dinner service, she sees owls, not flowers, and that calls forth the old tragedy. As Huw says, "Always it is owls, always we are destroyed. Why must she see owls and not flowers?" (153). Proinsias MacCana points out that Blodeuwedd is also the pivotal character in the Fourth Branch: "It is she more than any other character who imparts to the fourth branch the dramatic colour and force which raises it above the more balanced and more unified narrative of *Manawydan*" (59). Before Alison starts making paper owls, Roger and Gwyn are very friendly with each other; afterwards they are increasingly set against each other through their shared concern for Alison as well as by the cultural and social distinctions that are aggravated by the intense emotions loosed among them.

Where Garner departs from his original source is in his depiction of Gronw, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say in his interpretation of Gronw's actions. In the Mabinogi, Gronw steals Lleu's wife, attempts to murder Lleu, blames his actions on Blodeuwedd, and tries to avoid the consequences of his actions—first by asking for a volunteer to take his place and then by getting Lleu's permission to stand behind a stone while Lleu throws his spear. In *The Owl Service*, Huw tells Roger that Lleu was much to blame. Roger's reply foreshadows the ending of the book: "That bloke Gronw was the only one with any real guts: at the end" (53). Roger *is* Gronw, of course, and it is by his sacrificing his pain and anger that tragedy is averted. Carolyn Gillies interprets this ending as Garner's disagreement with the conclusion of the Fourth Branch. As she says, "according to the morals of the time Lleu should have taken blood money for the killing and not have exacted revenge" (114). Proof that Roger has broken the tragic cycle of the myth (if only temporarily) is that for once Gronw does not die.<sup>6</sup>

The main use Garner makes of the Mabinogi is thematic. He chooses to use myths in his work partly because he finds their themes to be universal. As he wrote in an article for the *New Statesman*, "traditional motifs are powerful ingredients in a modern story" ("Real Mandrakes" 591). Perhaps Neil Philip explains this best:

Though Garner's use of myth has altered considerably during his career it has always been used to sharpen our perception of emotional, intellectual or spiritual potentials which are either crushed or ignored in a materialistic, vicarious society. (151)

*The Owl Service* abounds with themes borrowed from the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi—themes that draw parallels between the original tale and the story of three contemporary adolescents.

One such theme is regeneration, though it would be more accurate to say that Garner borrows this theme from his scholarly sources rather than from the Mabinogi itself. One popular theory about the Mabinogi's origins is that it was at one time a mythological cycle, but the texts that have survived contain no internal evidence to support this theory. Nevertheless, Celtic scholars believe the Four Branches to be the detritus of a Welsh mythology, weakened through euhemerization and contact with Christianity. In *Math vab Mathonwy*, W. J. Gruffydd has gone so far as to reconstruct what he believes to be the original Welsh myths behind the Fourth Branch.<sup>7</sup> Gruffydd finds the story of Blodeuwedd "an intrusion" (258). Since Gruffydd wants the reconstituted myth to be the story of the birth, life, and death of Pryderi, the events which follow Pryderi's death in the Fourth Branch (the entire story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes) are incidental and unimportant. Most scholars, however, accept Blodeuwedd's presence with equanimity and interpret the tale as a regeneration myth. It is a part of what Robert Graves claims to be the theme of all Celtic poets—the ancient story of the God of the Waxing Year, the God of the Waning Year, and the Threefold Goddess. Gantz sees this regeneration motif as the unifying theme that holds the Four Branches together (Gantz, *Mabinogion* 15). Scholars who study ancient Celtic beliefs suggest that regeneration involves much more than a seasonal myth; it is also connected to the direct relationship between the potency of a king and the fertility of the land, sometimes requiring a blood sacrifice to heal an ailing land. Some commentators tie the Mabinogi to the tale of the wounded Fisher King, whose once verdant country has become a wasteland because of his injury.

Both aspects of regeneration—the seasonal and the sacrificial—appear in *The Owl Service*. Although Garner never specifies any date in the book, there are many references to the season, a particularly hot summer. Late winter or early spring might seem to be a more appropriate season for a reenactment of a regeneration myth, but this is the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes, whom scholars speculate was the Welsh personification of the Irish god Lug, in whose honor Lughnasad was celebrated on the first of August. Garner has chosen the name Gwyn because it is the

autumn name of Lleu (Philip 70). Garner has also selected the season carefully. He had been working with Celtic mythology for almost a decade and knew the significance of Lugnasad. What better time to act out a ritual involving Lleu? That it is a ritual is clear from the talk of the villagers and from Huw's statements: "Lleu, Blodeuwedd and Gronw Pebyr [*sic*]. They are the three who suffer every time" (71).

Garner mentions the fertility of the land more specifically. There are indications throughout the book that the valley is ailing. Alison senses instinctively that there is a connection between the land and the myth:

Look at this sick valley, Gwyn. Tumbledown buildings: rough land. I saw two dead sheep on the way up the track. Even poor old Clive can't catch a tiddler. Maybe once the power's loose things'll be better, until the next time. (99)

Gwyn's responsibility for the valley—his place as the king in the ritual marriage or sacrifice—is stated by Huw, who tells Gwyn repeatedly, "A lord must look to his people."

Incest is another theme Garner incorporates, although this is such a controversial one that he deals with it more through suggestion than by direct statement. The notion of incest comes from his source, the Everyman's Library edition of the *Mabinogion*, translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones. Unlike other translators (e.g., Lady Charlotte Guest and Jeffrey Gantz), who tidy up the relationship between Gwydion and Lleu, the Joneses retain the ambiguous references to Lleu as both son and nephew of Gwydion (*Mabinogion* 64, 65, 72). According to Gruffydd, in the latter part of the Fourth Branch it is clear that Gwydion is Lleu's father, a relationship that is assumed in seventeenth-century tradition (198–99). Since Lleu's mother, Aranrhod, is Gwydion's sister, the incest is obvious.

Garner weaves in this theme so skillfully that it is almost invisible. In an interview for *Children's Literature in Education* he made the following comments about the incest:

It is there but you almost have to have a degree in Old Welsh in order to see it, but it provides part of the nervous energy of *The Owl Service*. You are not meant to see it, but if you go there, it is there. ("Coming to Terms" 27)

It is there in Alison's comment, "The Wizard was his father, or uncle: I'm not sure" (45), and in Gwyn's remark that Huw is "a descendant of Gwydion, or of Lleu Llaw Gyffes: it comes to the same thing" (99). Although Garner says nothing to indicate that Huw and Nancy are more to each other than former lovers, he equates Nancy with Aranrhod and

Huw with Gwydion in such a way that a reader who has studied the Everyman translation may carry the identification further.<sup>8</sup> Neil Philip finds the evidence convincing: "It seems likely that we are meant to regard Huw and Nancy as brother and sister, and Gwyn as an incestuous as well as illegitimate child, like Lleu before him" (67).

Garner himself suggests another possible instance of incest: the reason why Alison's mother forbids Alison to have anything to do with Gwyn is a suspicion that Bertram may have fathered both teenagers ("Coming to Terms" 27). This suggestion is not clear in the text. Until Huw tells him differently, Gwyn does believe that Bertram was his father, but there is no real indication that Bertram was anything but Alison's distant cousin. The only mention of a possible relationship between Bertram and Alison's mother is Alison's comment, "I've noticed whenever he's mentioned Mummy goes all tragic" (101). Her mother's refusal to talk about Bertram's death may also be suggestive.<sup>9</sup>

Closely connected to the theme of incest is that of the mother-son relationship. In the Mabinogi, say Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, "Aranrhod's hostility to her son is rationalized to shame at his illegitimate birth and incestuous begetting" (*Mabinogion* xvii). Whether the same thing is true of Nancy and Gwyn is open to question. A mutual hostility is definitely present and sometimes takes a nasty turn, as when Gwyn puts the remains of a dead mouse in Nancy's purse. Like Lleu, Gwyn is illegitimate, and it may have been shame that led Nancy to leave the valley before Gwyn's birth. The hostility and hatred in the relationship are more developed in *The Owl Service* than in the Mabinogi; in the latter Aranrhod's feelings are very clear, but there is no indication of Lleu's feelings towards his mother. Gwyn responds to Nancy's viciousness in kind. Gwyn and Lleu are both forced into dependence on their mothers: Gwyn is helpless to determine his own education and lifestyle, and Lleu must depend on Aranrhod to supply his name and arms. Like Lleu, Gwyn is sometimes nameless: Nancy and Huw never call him anything but "boy." In Nancy's case, she is acting out her role as Aranrhod by refusing to give Gwyn a name; Garner is not sure why Huw also refuses to use Gwyn's name. Gwyn's "arms" are his grammar school education, which will equip him for better things in life; Nancy's threat to remove him from school is a serious threat to his future. Mother-son relationships have significance for the mythic reenactment as well, in that Roger's vulnerable point is his pain over his mother's abandonment of her family. Just as Lleu hurls a spear at Gronw, Gwyn hurls taunts about Roger's mother.<sup>10</sup>

Another theme borrowed from the Mabinogi concerns the choices people make. J. K. Bollard claims that "issues of human choice occur repeatedly throughout *The Four Branches* as the predominant overriding theme" (70). Blodeuwedd, Gronw Bebyr, and Lleu Llaw Gyffes are all faced with important choices. Bollard's idea differs from Gantz's notion that regeneration is the predominant theme. Garner does not seem to be concerned with establishing one theme as dominant, however; a multi-layered work like *The Owl Service* needs many interlocking themes.

Individual choice is something all of Garner's characters must face. The fact that Alison chooses to see owls instead of flowers on the dinner service (a choice Garner attributes to dysmenorrhoea) determines the events that follow. Although Garner has always been an elliptical writer, his failure to identify menstrual cramps as the source of Alison's irritability may also have been due to taboos that remained in place in children's literature until the 1970s. I must admit that I derive great enjoyment from the thought that one teenaged girl's bad period almost decimates an entire Welsh valley—finally someone is giving stomach cramps the respect and importance all sufferers know are due them. At the end of the book Gwyn is faced with the choice of forgiving Alison's betrayal or responding in kind; his decision to hold onto his pain seems to guarantee the destruction of all three main characters. In Garner's vision, though, choice can redeem as well as damn. When Gwyn refuses to comfort Alison and hits back at Roger, Roger sacrifices his own pain and anger, in effect choosing flowers instead of owls; this choice turns aside the destructive power Alison had let loose.

Besides themes, characters, geography, structure, and plot, Garner also draws much of his imagery from his Welsh source. Garner is skillful at evoking the original myth through sensory images. In *The Owl Service* he employs four of the senses: sight, hearing, touch, and smell. His main image is the owl, and like most of his images, it is a highly charged symbol. In many cultures the owl is associated with death, and Garner draws on that association throughout the novel. In the Welsh legends the owl represents Blodeuwedd, the woman made of flowers, who is punished for her adultery by being transformed into an owl. Robert Graves sees great significance in this transformation, identifying the Welsh owl as

the same owl that occurs on the coins of Athens as the symbol of Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom, the same owl that gave its name to Adam's first wife Lilith and as Annis the Blue Hag sucks the blood of children in primitive British folklore. (259–60)

The owl thus combines both negative and positive associations in one central image. Garner is fond of paradox, so he makes full use of this image.

In *The Owl Service* the owl appears in the form of Alison's paper owls, scratching sounds from the loft, the feather Alison picks up on a walk, a fluttering in the dark, marks in the dust, and a stuffed owl in the stable. As the story reaches its climax, Roger hears the noise of owls hunting and sees Blodeuwedd taking complete possession of Alison:

Roger brushed the feathers away from Alison. They circled and clung: circled and clung: the owl dance he had found in the dust. They were moving on the ceiling and the walls, and he began to see the patterns that had followed Huw in the rain: eyes and wings and sharpness: winged eyes, yellow, and blackness curved: all in the rafters and the wall and the feathers everywhere. There had never been so many feathers. He brushed them from Alison's cheek. She cried out, and he saw three lines scored from brow to neck, and on her hands, and no break in the skin. (152-53)

Also of significance to Garner's patterned sense of symmetry is that the stuffed owl Roger finds in the stable is an eagle owl, the perfect artistic balance to Lleu's transformation into an eagle. It is surely no coincidence that the eagle owl was killed and stuffed by Bertram—a parallel to Lleu's "death" at the hand of Gronw.

Garner also makes use of the flowers associated with Blodeuwedd—the oak, broom, and meadowsweet of which she was made. The odor of the meadowsweet in particular pervades the book. Gwyn smells meadowsweet when he finds the dinner service in the loft. At the same moment Roger is lying in meadowsweet by the riverbank when he feels the vibration of Lleu's spear, and afterwards Roger looks at his hands: "The meadowsweet had cut him, lining his palm with red beads. The flowers stank of goat" (12). The smell of goat recalls the goat on which Lleu half stood when Gronw wounded him with the spear. Considering Garner's thorough grounding in classical literature, he must also be drawing upon other mythological associations of the goat.

The dinner service from which Alison traces her paper owls is a particularly useful device for drawing together both aspects of Blodeuwedd—flowers and owls. No doubt this is why the title refers to it. This dinner service actually exists; it was owned by Garner's mother-in-law, and his wife, Griselda, was the person who discovered that tracing the flowers could transform the pattern into a three-dimensional paper owl. This serendipitous discovery helped inspire the novel. One of the plates

from the original owl service now hangs in the Garners' kitchen, one of the many literary totems that have stimulated Garner's creative energy.

The Stone of Gronw is another powerful image in the book. Roger discovers it after his unsettling experience with the meadowsweet, and he is fascinated by the hole through the rock. He calls it a "crafty precision job," which is an indirect reference to Llew's nickname of Skillful Hand. Roger spends a lot of time taking photographs through the hole—photos in which inexplicable images of horsemen and motorcycles appear.

Garner has constructed another motif that is peripheral to his source: water imagery recurs throughout the novel, as river, rain, and flood. Llew Llaw Gyffes could only be killed on the riverbank while he stood with one foot on a goat and the other on the edge of a tub. Garner locates the Stone of Gronw (the site of Llew's death as well as Gronw's) on the bank of the river where Roger swims every day. Blodeuwedd's reflection appears in the fish tank near the house.<sup>11</sup> In the last fourth of *The Owl Service* the weather turns very wet, finally becoming a torrential downpour. Garner's most striking image is of Nancy heading for the mountain pass in the pouring rain, abandoning her son and the valley and everything in it:

She turned, but did not stop. She walked backwards up the road, shouting, and the rain washed the air clear of her words and dissolved her haunted face, broke the dark line of her into webs that left no stain, and Gwyn watched for a while the unmarked place where she had been, then climbed over the gate. (147)

The image of Nancy walking backwards in the rain brings to mind the image of Blodeuwedd's maidens fleeing towards the mountains in fear of Gwydion, so frightened that they walked backwards and fell in the lake and drowned.

Everything discussed thus far involves some kind of direct borrowing from the Mabinogi, but Garner has also made use of his source in more indirect ways. *The Owl Service* invokes what Gantz calls "the misty Celtic past of has been and never was" (Gantz, *Mabinogion* 10). In legendary Wales, all time is coexistent; as Barbara Kiefer puts it, the past and the present are one and the same (96). Garner makes effective use of this notion of coexistent time.<sup>12</sup> When Alison tries to express her fears to Gwyn, she explains them in terms of time:

Nothing's safe any more. I don't know where I am. "Yesterday," "today," "tomorrow"—they don't mean anything. I feel they're here at the same time: waiting. (67)



Elsewhere Garner writes of Gwyn playing with time, "splitting a second into minutes, and then into hours—or taking an hour and compressing it to an instant" (59). As in the Welsh mind-set, time is neither fixed nor linear in *The Owl Service*. While this amorphous concept of time is not delineated in the Mabinogi, it can easily be interpolated from the events in the tales. Since Garner has long been fascinated by the nature of time, the suggestion of a different perception of time would be enough to stimulate his thought.

Another indirect way Garner uses his source is to allow himself to be influenced by secondary interpretations of the tale, particularly that of Robert Graves, who interprets the story of Blodeuwedd in a mythological context. Graves's influence can be traced in all of Garner's novels. It appears in two major concepts in *The Owl Service*: the idea of twinning and the concept of the triple goddess.

Graves proposes that Lleu always appears with a twin. He has a twin at birth—Dylan Eil Ton—who immediately swims out to sea and is heard of no more. Graves suggests that Gwydion stands in as a twin when he and Lleu visit Aranrhod and that Gronw Bebyr later becomes Lleu's twin (261). This idea of a light twin and a dark twin works well with Jungian psychology. The archetype of the Shadow, which represents the primitive, unformed, repressed, and creative side of a person, is much like a dark twin to the self. Like Dr. Jekyll, Lleu is somehow incomplete and weak without his Mr. Hyde.

Garner is clearly intrigued by this notion of twinning, which exemplifies so well his conviction that paradox is central to literature. He was experimenting with the idea as early as *The Weirdestone of Brisingamen*, in which the villain Grimnir turns out to be the wizard Cadellin's identical twin brother. Moreover, Grimnir's real name is Govannon. Since Gofannon is one of the Sons of Don in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, Garner may intend Cadellin to be Gwydion (Philip 36). By the time he wrote *The Owl Service*, Garner had learned a much more sophisticated application of the notion of twinning: he encourages his readers to confuse Roger's and Gwyn's roles in the myth and the persons of Gronw and Lleu:

They are opposite sides of each other, in other words Gronw is Lleu and Lleu is Gronw. . . . But if you follow the text closely, in fact Gwyn equals Lleu, Gronw equals Roger. If you see it the other way round that is fine, because that is how the myth works. ("Coming to Terms" 28–29)

One critic, writing of her reactions to *The Owl Service*, complains, "When I first read the book, I couldn't tell which of the boys was meant

to be which of the figures in the myth" (Berman 20). This confusion of roles is an effect Garner has carefully constructed. In the Nancy/Huw/Bertram triangle, Bertram is supposedly Gronw: he is the hunter, the outsider who disrupts a steady relationship, the murder victim. Yet Bertram is the one who is clever with his hands, indicating a connection with Llew Llaw Gyffes, whose name means "the fair-haired one with the skillful hand." The roles are even more confusing in the contemporary triangle; Gwyn is the one who keeps seeing and hearing Bertram's motorbike, yet Roger is the one who smells of petrol. Roger, an amateur photographer, is also skillful with his hands, though he is supposedly identified with Gronw Bebyr. Gwyn is ostensibly the Llew figure, but he is the one Alison keeps with her in the woods all night—a clear parallel to Blodeuwedd's refusal to let Gronw depart. And it is Alison's relationship with Gwyn that earns parental disapproval, just as Blodeuwedd's adultery with Gronw Bebyr brought down Gwydion's wrath.

Garner's application of Graves's ideas about the triple goddess are more far-reaching. In effect, every single female character in all of Garner's novels is meant to represent some aspect of the triple goddess: the beautiful young woman associated with the new moon, the mature earth goddess of the full moon, or the vengeful hag of the waning moon. This mythological use of the female has been misinterpreted by some reviewers as a failure on Garner's part to overcome stereotypes (e.g., Cameron). Rather than being stereotypes, however, the female characters in Garner's works are symbols of matriarchal power, which can be used for good or ill.

Triple goddesses are well known in Celtic mythology. According to the eminent Welsh scholar Rachel Bromwich, "A marked predilection for triple groupings is discernible among the Celtic peoples from the time of their earliest records" (lxiii). The Welsh triads with which Bromwich is concerned are to Graves evidence of triple goddesses going back almost to the dawn of time. Graves believes that a triple goddess was the first being ever worshipped in prehistoric Britain, which is why Britain is "a Mother Country not a Father Land" (337). He sees in the story of Blodeuwedd a certain amount of patriarchal interference in a myth that originally concerned the White Goddess, who "had been an Owl thousands of years before Gwydion was born" (259). Graves finds further evidence to support his theories in earlier events in Llew's life:

The clearest sign that in Arianrhod [*sic*] we have the old matriarchal Triple Goddess, or White Goddess, lies in her giving her son Llew [*sic*] Llaw a name and a set of arms. In patriarchal society it is always the father who gives both.

Llew Llaw has no father at all, in the Romance, and must remain anonymous until his mother is tricked into making a man of him. (78)

In *The Owl Service* Garner plays with the concept of the triple goddess in several ways. He constructs one triad of Blodeuwedd, Alison, and Nancy. Garner is not prone to giving descriptions of the characters in his novels, but he specifically describes Alison and Blodeuwedd in terms of Graves's physical description of the White Goddess: blue eyes and blonde hair. This triad represents Graves's moon goddess, with Alison as the new moon aspect, Blodeuwedd the full moon, and Nancy the waning moon.

Garner forms another triple goddess of the three mothers of the main characters, although Nancy is the only mother actually present in the book. Mothers are powerful (and often oppressive) figures in many of Garner's works—goddesses to be hated and feared and worshipped. Graves would equate this triad of mothers with Cerridwen, whom at times he represents as a mother goddess and at other times as goddess of the underworld. Nancy appears in this triad in her role as Aranrhod, who has been identified as one aspect of Cerridwen (Graves 76). To Garner, all three mothers represent the cruellest incarnation of the triple goddess. Roger's mother has abandoned her family; Nancy treats her son as a hated possession. Margaret, Alison's mother, is the most intriguing aspect of this goddess. She never actually appears in *The Owl Service*; she remains offstage throughout the book, but her presence is strongly felt.<sup>13</sup> Her family will go to any length to avoid upsetting her or to placate her if they fail. Garner calls her a "powerful fulcrum . . . this mythological thing" ("Coming to Terms" 29).

Alison and Clive, Roger's father, are completely under Margaret's thumb; Roger himself resents her but generally knuckles under. The only character Margaret has no power over is Gwyn, who does not understand the power she holds over the others:

What can she do? Hang you in chains in the family dungeon? Lock you in a turret? Your name Rapunzel or something, is it? What can she do, girl? Shoot you? (115)

Margaret's unseen presence haunts the book much as Blodeuwedd's does and with similar effect. All three mothers wield the power to inflict incurable psychic wounds.

Garner's borrowings from the Mabinogi and from Graves add complexity and depth to the story of three troubled adolescents. In *The Owl Service* Garner uses the tale of Blodeuwedd to examine a series of mod-

ern tensions: the generation gap, social classes, the collision of Welsh and English cultures, intellect versus intuition, and the passionate struggle between man and woman. To Garner myth is the ultimate reality, a powerful tool that works beneath the surface. In "The Death of Myth" he calls it "distilled and violent truth" (606).

*The Owl Service* is a landmark in children's literature; perhaps it would be more accurate to say a landmark in literature for young adults. As a genre, literature for postpubescent readers did not officially exist until S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* appeared in 1967, the same year as *The Owl Service*. If Hinton is the mother of young adult literature in America, Garner has a claim to being the father of adolescent literature in Britain. However, since there was yet no large body of books addressed to teen readers, *The Owl Service* was greeted as a children's book and won awards in that category. Garner's readers were not Celtic scholars; the fact that the book works well for readers who are completely ignorant of the Mabinogi and *The White Goddess* proves Garner's skill as a mythmaker.

A quarter of a century after its publication *The Owl Service* continues to exert a strong influence in children's fantasy, particularly among British writers. In the Spring 1990 issue of *The New Welsh Review*—an issue devoted to Anglo-Welsh children's literature—six articles discuss or mention Alan Garner. This is a remarkable amount of attention to give to a man who is *not* an Anglo-Welsh writer and who wrote only one book dealing with Wales. The fact that *The Owl Service* has remained in print for thirty years is proof of its continued popularity.

The novel is also a success by Garner's own artistic standards. Literature, he says, is "words that provoke interpretation; that invite the reader or listener to partake of the creative act" ("Beyond the Tenth Kingdom" 4). *The Owl Service* is still provoking interpretation among critics and readers; this particular onion may never reveal all of its layers.

## NOTES

1. Griselda Garner made her comment casually during my visit to the Garners on 16 October 1990. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from either of the Garners are taken from an interview conducted during that visit.

2. The first three volumes of the *Chronicles of Prydain* were published in London by Heinemann in 1966, 1967, and 1968 respectively, but did not remain in print for long. In 1974 Collins brought out Armada Lions paperback editions of the first two books, which were joined by the third book in 1978 and the final two volumes in 1980. The fourth and fifth volumes did not appear in hardback editions until 1986.

3. Quotes from Jenny Nimmo are taken from a personal interview conducted on 8 November 1990.

4. During our 1990 interview, Garner said that *The Moon of Gomrath* would shortly be republished with his original ending restored. He altered the book at the request of his editor and left it unchanged until her recent retirement.

5. Interestingly, the tale of Lleu Llaw Gyffes and Blodeuwedd is the only passage Robert Graves quotes in its entirety in *The White Goddess*, using Lady Charlotte Guest's translation as his source. Graves builds much of his poetic argument on this passage. Although Garner credits the Mabinogi itself with stimulating his imagination, I suspect Graves's emphasis on this particular section may have been a stronger influence than Garner remembers.

6. Critics often assume that Roger has broken the power of the myth completely and, in effect, ended a curse on the valley (e.g., Foss, Gillies), but there is no such indication in the book. Garner intends the myth to continue. Although Roger has chosen flowers rather than owls, his choice is merely for his generation; the future must look to itself.

7. Gruffydd published his book in 1928, but his basic theory had been current for some time—at least since 1914, when John Young Evans published *Pryderi fab Pwyll* (see Chapter Two).

8. Ruth Berman is critical of the elliptical use Garner has made of the Everyman edition: "The problem is partly that it is necessary to have read the myth to know what is going on. The book gives enough information to piece it out, but the information is scattered too widely to be combined by a reader who does not already know the pattern" (20). Charles Sullivan agrees with Berman (*Welsh Celtic Myth* 25), but Philip puts up a spirited defense (70).

9. I suspect that Garner's comments about Alison's possible relationship to Bertram may be an instance of pulling the interviewer's leg—an activity in which the author by his own admission occasionally indulges. Neil Philip shares my doubts (67).

10. This is another point with which Ruth Berman takes issue. She feels that Garner confuses and trivializes the myth in his modern reenactment: "But Alison's innocence, compared to Blodeuwedd's guilt, is a confusing distortion of the myth; and although friendship may be compared symbolically with sexual love, it is confusing to have several generations' worth of betrayed love and murder suddenly, in this generation, producing mere betrayed secrets and name-calling" (20). Eleanor Cameron agrees with Berman (433), but Sullivan (*Welsh Celtic Myth* 27–28) and Philip (68) believe that the adolescent characters are the ideal vehicle for carrying the myth because adolescence is a time of intense emotion as well as a border country in itself.

11. The fish pond may be borrowed from Graves. One of the most obscure chapters in *The White Goddess* begins with an unfinished poem about nuns and a fish pond and continues with an imaginary conversation between a Greek and a Roman about Vestal Virgins and sacred fishes. Alison is a type of Vestal Virgin, as well as being an incarnation of the Triple Goddess.

12. Garner believes that the Celtic sense of time is much more complicated than simple coexistence of past, present, and future. For an introduction to his theories about time, see Neil Philip, *A Fine Anger*. *Red Shift* exemplifies Garner's most complete application of his theories to date. His latest novel, *Strand-loper* (1996) also plays with notions of time.

13. At least one critic disagrees strongly with Garner's decision to keep Margaret offstage. David Rees, who is highly critical of Garner's novels, thinks that Margaret's absence leaves too large a hole in the book (287).

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## *Chapter 5*

# Lloyd Alexander's Chronicles of Prydain

At the same time that Alan Garner was beginning his intense research into Welsh mythology, Lloyd Alexander was completing the manuscript of a children's fantasy called *The Battle of Trees*. That, at any rate, was its working title, but after editor Ann Durell had insisted on removing the titular passage, Alexander accepted the suggestion of Holt's art director, Nonny Hogrogian, and renamed the manuscript *The Book of Three* (Durell 53). The fictional Book of Three for which the volume was named was an ancient and magical tome containing a record of past, present, and future events in Alexander's imaginary land of Prydain: an appropriate title for the first volume of the Chronicles of Prydain, which, in a different sense, also contained a record of the past, present, and future of Prydain.

When Alexander began writing about Prydain, he expected to write a trilogy retelling three Welsh legends. The proposal that Ann Durell ac-



cepted on behalf of Holt, Rinehart and Winston was for a trilogy entitled *The Sons of Llyr* (Jacobs, "Critical Biography" 547–49). The first volume, *The Battle of Trees*, would recount the adventures of a warrior magician named Gwydion as he attempts to discover the secret name of King Arawn so that King Amathaon can defeat him in battle. Book II would be called *The Lion with the Steady Hand* and would be a straightforward retelling of the legend of Lleu Llaw Gyffes, although Alexander intended to transform Aranhod into a wicked stepmother. The third book would be *Little Gwion* and would tell the story of Taliesin, the most famous bard in Welsh legend.

Although Alexander claims that the idea for this trilogy came from the Mabinogion, the three legends he selected from Lady Charlotte Guest's translation are the same three upon which Robert Graves constructed his "historical grammar of poetic myth" in *The White Goddess*. Alexander admits that his choice of material was not coincidental: these three legends captured his imagination when he read Graves's book and were the basis of his initial idea to retell the Welsh tales.<sup>1</sup> Graves and Guest, says the author, are the two main sources he drew upon for the *Chronicles of Prydain*. In fact, Prydain might never have existed were it not for Alexander's admiration for Graves's novels and poems. *The White Goddess* is an abstract and esoteric book, and Alexander "got absolutely nothing from it" when he first read it:

I gave up on it. I did read the whole thing, and it was just incomprehensible. And a couple of years later, whenever it was, some years later he came out with *The Greek Myths*, which was brilliant. . . . And that sparked my interest in *The White Goddess* again, because he referred to it. And I read it a second time and I got a little more out of it.

*The White Goddess* leads directly to Lady Charlotte Guest, from whose translation and footnotes Graves drew the legends upon which he constructed his poetic grammar. Alexander reread both works continually while working on the *Chronicles*, paying particular attention to Guest's footnotes and Graves's commentary rather than to the text of the translation itself.

Graves's initial influence seems to have waned, however, as far as the concept of the series is concerned, as Alexander's confidence in his own creative talents increased. The influence of Alexander's editor cannot be discounted either: Durell is responsible for suggesting the creation of Alexander's two main characters, Taran the Assistant Pig-Keeper and Eilonwy the reluctant princess. When Alexander submitted his proposed trilogy, Durell insisted that he make one major change: "I made only one

*caveat*: put in two human characters (boy and girl) of your own devising to make a bridge for the reader" (Durell 52). Taran's adventures took over the series, and Alexander had to revamp his plans for the second and third volumes of the trilogy.

The plot of *The Book of Three* remains true to its source in general terms: there is still a battle between Arawn's forces and the Sons of Don, and Gwydion conquers Arawn's champion by learning his secret name. However, these majestic events are merely the background for the adventures of Taran and his friends. *The Black Cauldron*, the second book in the series, bears no resemblance to the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes, and *The Castle of Llyr* has nothing to do with the legend of Taliesin, whose story remains only in a simplified form as the basis for the wizard Dallben's childhood. Before he had proceeded far into the third book, Alexander realized he needed a fourth book to complete the series, so he wrote the first draft of what was to become *The High King*. When Durell read the manuscript, she decided that the three-year gap between the adventures in *The Castle of Llyr* and *The High King* left too much unsaid about Taran's maturation, so at her suggestion Alexander inserted another volume, *Taran Wanderer* (Durell 54). After a final revision of *The High King*, the five-volume Chronicles of Prydain were complete.

These five books are not Alexander's only works about Prydain. Again at Durell's suggestion, Alexander wrote two books for younger children; these were illustrated by Evaline Ness, who had produced the book jackets for the five Prydain books. Holt published the first of these, *Coll and His White Pig*, in 1965, the same year *The Black Cauldron* appeared; the second, *The Truthful Harp*, came out in 1967 along with *Taran Wanderer*.<sup>2</sup> Five years after the publication of *The High King*, Alexander published a collection of short stories about Prydain entitled *The Foundling and Other Tales of Prydain*. These stories deal mainly with events that predate Taran's adventures, but most of the characters are familiar faces to fans of Prydain.

Since 1973 Alexander has written nothing about Prydain, concentrating instead on individual fantasies, a trilogy about the imaginary but nonmagical land of Westmark, and a series of Indiana Jones-type adventures about a turn-of-the-century Philadelphia teenager named Vesper Holly. Alexander has recently turned from Vesper Holly, with whom he admits he is infatuated, to write about new characters living in mythic Greece and India and ancient China. *The Arkadians* is a loving spoof of Greek myth and legend, while *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen* touches more closely on the human capacity for evil, distanced from the reader by its setting in eighth-century China. The latter

book, Alexander says, has connections to Prydain and Westmark in that all three represent in various ways his attempt to come to terms with his own war experience.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in Alexander's latest novel, *The Iron Ring*, a young warrior king in mythological India must come to grips with his own capacity for good and evil. In a broad sense, all of these works deal with what happens when youthful idealism meets the realities of war. Alexander has worked out his own interpretation of the underlying connections between the Prydain and Westmark series:

the Prydain books all together might be an attempt to express what it takes to become a human—all the things that you have to go through and give up and learn and so forth to become a real human being. The Westmark books take up the question of having become a human being, how do you stay human in the face of all these terrible things that are bearing down on you? And the answer is, with great difficulty.

*The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen*, which contains such brutal passages that editor Ann Durell "came unglued," as Alexander puts it, continues the author's spiritual journey towards an understanding of his past. From his own account, Alexander has not yet attained the peace and resolution Alan Garner found in *The Stone Book Quartet*, but like Garner, Alexander is taking his search into his personal history. Eighth-century China may seem a far cry from twentieth-century Philadelphia, but many of the physical objects that appear in *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen* are based on artifacts imported from China by Alexander's father half a century ago.

In one sense, then, the Chronicles of Prydain were a beginning for Alexander—the first step in his spiritual journey. In another sense, they are a complete cycle in themselves, as originally intended. With strong backing from editor Ann Durell and publisher Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Alexander took a traditional English genre (fantasy) and a handful of traditional Welsh tales and created a uniquely American epic. Publishing a children's fantasy was a risky undertaking in the American educational climate of 1964, but from the first volume Holt knew it had a winner. When Ann Durell read the first draft of *The Book of Three*, she wrote in a letter to Alexander's agent, "My first reaction was at last, at last America has produced a writer who's a challenger for the great allegorical fantasy crown, worn for so long by the British" (Jacobs, "Critical Biography" 272). Her colleagues at Holt shared her enthusiasm: the company took the risk of ordering 20,000 copies printed instead of the usual 10,000 or 12,500, and *The Book of Three* was the lead item of their fall list for 1964 (Jacobs, "Critical Biography" 274). The risk

paid off. All five volumes of the Chronicles of Prydain have remained in print in America since their initial publication.

Critics were enthusiastic as well. Except for an occasional complaint about Alexander's flippant tone or an accusation that he had imitated earlier fantasists, the reviews were favorable.<sup>4</sup> *The Black Cauldron* became a Newbery Honor Book, and *The High King* won the Newbery Medal itself, as well as being a finalist for the National Book Award.<sup>5</sup> Disney produced a feature-length cartoon version of *The Black Cauldron* in 1985. Although the film was not as close an adaptation as Alexander would have liked, it no doubt contributed to sales of the Chronicles and was probably influential in Heinemann's decision to publish hardback versions of the entire series in Britain. To date the books have been translated into fourteen languages, including Japanese, Hebrew, and Icelandic (Tunnell and Jacobs 30).

Despite the fact that Alexander borrows from many of the same sources as Alan Garner and both writers claim to remain true to the spirit of the Welsh legends, the published products of their work bear no resemblance to each other. For one thing, there is a strong cultural difference. As Norma Bagnall points out, Garner's attitudes, and those of his characters, are founded on British class distinctions, whereas Alexander and his young protagonist share a belief in the American ideal that all men are created equal (25–26). (Women, no matter how feisty, had fewer opportunities in fictional Prydain and 1960s America, despite the author's respect for women and for the feminist movement.) Although not of noble descent, Taran rises from Assistant Pig-Keeper to High King of Prydain. His is a Horatio Alger success story—a fairy tale version of “any boy can be president.”

Bagnall is not the first critic to notice a peculiarly American slant to the Chronicles of Prydain. Marion Carr, attempting to fit Taran into the mold of the classic hero, reluctantly concludes that the Assistant Pig-Keeper breaks the pattern by deciding to remain behind and build a sea wall rather than to depart with the immortals. In effect, Taran's Protestant work ethic keeps him from participating in eternal life. Similarly, Ann Swinfen sees a link to the myth of the American frontier: “Alexander's writing is a curious but interesting blend of this love for the ancient royal and courtly framework of medieval life and the very American ideals of the independent frontiersman” (84). Taran and Gurgi (his faithful companion) are thus literary descendants of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook or the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

Jill May's volume on Alexander for Twayne's United States Authors Series also stresses the American quality of the Prydain books, although

she thinks they are consistent with their Welsh sources until the third book of the series, *The Castle of Llyr*. Not only is the tone of the series American, says May, but it is twentieth-century American and therefore speaks directly to modern child readers (May 50). Only Kath Filmer-Davies seems to disagree about the American quality of the series. In *Fantasy Fiction and Welsh Myth* she notes a general feeling of Welshness in Alexander's books and sees his themes as either universal or thoroughly Welsh: the search for identity, the need to belong, and the connection between person and place. Nevertheless, Taran's sudden promotion from farm laborer to king is a success story cut from an American pattern, not from a Welsh one.

Alexander's hero is not the only thing stamped "made in America"; the political ideology that emerges in the final two books of the series owes more to 1776 than to medieval Wales. In *Taran Wanderer*, the Free Commots, where people govern themselves, are held up as the political ideal, and even the autocratic King Smoit recognizes that a ruler holds power only by the consent of the governed. In the final book, Taran becomes High King almost by consensus; the only concession to the normal rules of succession is that his bride is a princess. All of the characters most closely linked to the old political order sail away to the Summer Country, leaving the way clear for a new era of self-government in Prydain.

Another difference between Alexander and Garner is that the latter concentrates on dark elemental forces and therefore maintains a somber mood, while the former's tone is more lighthearted and humorous. Alexander's books are also less complex stylistically and psychologically, more action-filled and more didactic. Whereas Garner interweaves multiple story lines and layers of meaning, Alexander's plots are direct and simple—events gallop along at breathtaking speed. Hunting for themes in Garner's works requires a time-consuming archeological excavation; opencast mining is sufficient for Alexander, who plants his themes very near the surface. This is not meant as a criticism of Alexander. Not only is he writing for a younger audience than Garner, but he is also writing for an American audience less familiar with fantasy conventions than the British young adults who are Garner's primary audience. Unlike the British, who admire and respect fantasy as a literary genre, Americans have historically regarded fantasy with suspicion and dismissed it as mere escapism. Alexander's books are not simplistic—college students with no background in fantasy reading often have difficulty following the story or even catching the humor in the Chronicles.

Beneath Alexander's humor runs a strong streak of didacticism, particularly in the first three books. In *The Book of Three*, every authority figure in Taran's life lectures him about his rash behavior: the wizard Dallben (23–24), the farmer Coll (25), Prince Gwydion (32, 34, 37, 45, 48, 54), the wise hermit Medwyn (144), even the irresponsible Fflewddur Fflam (96). By the third volume, Taran develops a few learning strategies (no doubt a matter of self-preservation) and swallows his lessons in character building more promptly. Jill May sees the didacticism as natural, given the focus on the young protagonist. If growing up is the overarching theme of the series, then lessons in life are inevitable. The protagonists in Alexander's more recent books go through a similar learning process, receiving occasional homilies and lectures even from their closest friends, particularly from the heroines who accompany them on their adventures.

Despite their differences in approach and treatment, Garner and Alexander use their basic source in much the same way: borrowing characters, settings, plot elements, and tone. In Garner's case, the basic source is the Jones and Jones Everyman edition of the *Mabinogion*, whereas Alexander draws upon Lady Charlotte Guest's translation, particularly her scholarly notes.

Alexander's protagonist, Taran the Assistant Pig-Keeper, is not a character from the *Mabinogi*. The name Taran appears in a list of warriors in "Culhwch and Olwen," the earliest Arthurian tale in the *Mabinogion*; the same tale provides names for Fflewddur Fflam, Gurgi, Ellidyr Son of Pen-Llarcaw, Prince Rhun, Gwystyl, and Morgant.<sup>6</sup> Taran himself is Alexander's own creation—an impatient, brave, neurotically responsible orphan who grows up to become the High King of Prydain. There are, however, parallels between Taran and characters in the Four Branches. Like Pwyll Prince of Dyfed in the First Branch, Taran habitually leaps into action without pausing for thought. In a study of character development in the *Mabinogi*, Catherine Byfield notes that Pwyll's impetuosity is balanced by his sense of honor and that he grows in wisdom and maturity throughout the First Branch. Byfield's description of Pwyll's development parallels that of Taran. Taran, along with the youthful male protagonists in other Alexander novels, also exhibits a Pwyll-like talent for sticking his foot in his mouth. Certainly the repartee between Pwyll and Rhiannon echoes in Taran's relationship with the princess Eilonwy, particularly in Eilonwy's sharp putdowns of Taran's thoughtless remarks.

Taran's personality also resembles that of Pryderi, Pwyll's son: both are rash and impetuous and eager to fight. The younger Pryderi of the

First Branch shares Taran's instinctive sense of honor and, for a short time, his lack of parents. Pryderi, however, is not aware of his parentless state, while Taran is obsessed with his. Given the importance of family connections in Welsh culture, Taran's concern over his lack of known parentage is understandable. Finally, Taran's friendship with Prince Gwydion parallels that of Pryderi and the wiser, cautious Manawydan.

The relationship to Gwydion also encourages a comparison between Taran and Lleu Llaw Gyffes.<sup>7</sup> Although Gwydion is neither Taran's uncle nor his father, his role as mentor and protector reflects that of the original Gwydion. In the Mabinogi, Gwydion raises Lleu from infancy, tricks Aranrhod into giving the boy a name and arms, tracks down the wounded Lleu and nurses him back to health, and assists him in his revenge against Gronw Bebyr and Blodeuwedd. Taran, too, is an orphan being raised by an enchanter—in this case the wise and somnolent Dallben. However, Taran is not at all dependent upon Gwydion for nurturing, although each tends the other's wounds on several occasions. The similarity lies more in the personal relationship between a young, would-be warrior and a seasoned war leader. Since Alexander had originally intended to retell the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes in his second volume, that relationship, which is central to the Welsh legend, must have remained at the back of his mind as the story changed and developed.

Gwydion himself, of course, is borrowed from the Mabinogi, but his character has been whitewashed. The genealogy is similar. As Dallben explains to Taran,

He [Arawn] would have ruled had it not been for the Children of Don, the sons of the Lady Don and her consort Belin, King of the Sun. Long ago they voyaged to Prydain from the Summer Country and found the land rich and fair, though the race of men had little for themselves. The Sons of Don built their stronghold at Caer Dathyl, far north in the Eagle Mountains. (*Book of Three* 22)

This account owes as much to Robert Graves (and perhaps J.R.R. Tolkien) as it does to the Mabinogi. The medieval text merely refers to Gwydion and his brothers as the Sons of Don and locates their court at Caer Dathyl. Graves and a number of Celtic scholars generated the theory that the characters in the Mabinogi are euhemerized Welsh gods—a theory Alexander seems to suggest by calling Belin "King of the Sun." The Summer Country from which the Sons of Don have sailed is reminiscent of Tolkien's Westeros. In fact, in interviews with Michael Tunnell, Alexander has compared the Sons of Don to Tolkien's elves, referring to them as demigods (Tunnell, *Prydain Companion* 213).

In order to provide Taran with a role model, Alexander makes Gwydion into a traditional fantasy hero along the lines of Tolkien's Aragorn, while retaining Gwydion's magical talents. Like his original, Alexander's Gwydion is a master of disguise; in *The Castle of Llyr* he disguises himself as a shoemaker, as did the original Gwydion in the Fourth Branch. The purposes are different, however: the Prydainian Gwydion is not attempting to trick his sister, but rather he has gone undercover to track down a threat against Eilonwy. Gwydion employs his talents as a magician somewhat differently too; stealing pigs and organizing sexual assaults would not be appropriate behavior for Taran's role model. The original Prince of Don had created a ship out of seaweed; in *The Book of Three* Alexander's hero uses a magical net of grass to fight off enemy warriors. Although Prydain's war leader has no magic wand to transform flowers into maidens and maidens into owls, his supernatural ability to understand the language of animals (earned at great personal cost) enables him to defeat the Horned King, the enemy's champion.

Alexander's female protagonist, Eilonwy, is not borrowed directly from the Mabinogi, but she has connections to some of the Welsh characters. When she first encounters Taran, she introduces herself in terms of her heritage, almost in the traditional Welsh fashion of reciting four generations of forebears:

"I am Eilonwy, daughter of Angharad, daughter of Regat, daughter of—oh, it's such a bother going through all that. My ancestors," she said proudly, "are the Sea People. I am of the blood of Llyr Half-Speech, the Sea King." (*Book of Three* 73)

The Children of Llyr—Branwen, Bran, and Manawydan—are major characters in the Second and Third Branches. Although Eilonwy's personality does not resemble Branwen's, there are a few parallels in their lives worth noting. Both serve as scullery maids, though Eilonwy's service is voluntary whereas Branwen's is a punishment. Both are held captive on islands which are devastated during the rescue process, and both rescues involve intelligent birds with the power of speech. In Branwen's case, she trains a starling to speak and sends it with a message to her brother Bran, while Eilonwy's prison is discovered by the crow Kaw, who then flies back to inform Taran and his companions. Jill May takes for granted that Branwen is the model for Eilonwy, even though their stories and characters are quite different. Branwen is far too passive and quiet to be a model for the plucky, talkative Eilonwy.

Several critics see a resemblance between Eilonwy and Rhiannon. They are both, says Patricia Trautmann, "quick-witted and sharp-



tongued" (61). Elizabeth Lane points out that Eilonwy speaks to Taran in the same manner as Rhiannon speaks to Pwyll (26). However, according to Alexander, all such resemblances are accidental. He states firmly that Eilonwy's character is based on his own experience of women, whom he has found to be spunky, spirited, and intelligent:

I'm convinced that all of my heroines and Eilonwy are sisters under the skin. . . . This is the way I have always perceived women to be. I have never personally met a woman, as far back as I can remember, including my mother and classmates and everything else up to and including the present day—I personally have never met a dumb woman. . . . The only experience I've had has been with very active, very competent, very bright, very feisty girls, women, old women.

One thing Alexander did not intend was to represent Eilonwy in any way as a goddess, but he readily admits he may have been operating under the influence of Graves when Eilonwy first appears with her belt of silver links and a silver crescent-moon pendant around her neck.<sup>8</sup> A reader coming to *The Book of Three* after a close examination of *The White Goddess* cannot help noticing echoes of Graves's triple moon goddess in Eilonwy's appearance. Alexander claims that his only consciously constructed triple goddess is found in the three witches of Morva—Orddu, Orgoch, and Orwen—although he has also confessed that the prophetic pig Hen Wen is "the Old White Sow, an aspect of the goddess Cerridwen" ("The Truth about Fantasy" 102). Two of the witches are borrowed from "Culhwch and Olwen." One of Culhwch's tasks is to get the blood of the Black Witch (Orddu), the daughter of the White Witch (Orwen), "from the head of the Valley of Grief in the uplands of Hell" (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 135), a task which Arthur himself has to perform after four of his knights are defeated by the witch. However, Graves's influence must have been stronger than Alexander realized, because the triple moon goddess is reflected throughout the books in the figures of Eilonwy and the enchantress Achren.

Elizabeth Lane has noted that the names Orddu, Orwen, and Orgoch are differentiated by colors (27). "Ddu," "wen," and "goch" are the Welsh feminine forms of black, white, and red. Although Alexander found the first two names in "Culhwch and Olwen," he seems to have invented the third name to complete his triad. These three colors were not chosen randomly; they are the colors associated with Graves's triple goddess: "the New Moon is the white goddess of birth and growth; the Full Moon, the red goddess of love and battle; the Old Moon, the black goddess of death and divination" (Graves 52). In their final appearance, the witches of Morva wear robes of white, crimson, and black. Despite

Alexander's contention that these witches are the only triple goddess in his books, the same three linked colors and their associations reappear in connection with Eilonwy and Achren. Eilonwy, as her crescent-moon pendant suggests, is associated with the triple goddess in her new moon aspect. Appropriately enough, Eilonwy first appears clad in white. Though Eilonwy is not herself a goddess, she is certainly under the influence of the white goddess of birth and growth, for the princess grows and matures throughout the five books.

The other two aspects of the triple goddess are associated with Achren. At her initial appearance, the enchantress is at the height of her powers—still operating under the influence of the full moon. Taran first sees her in her black and red council chamber:

Her long hair glittered silver in the torchlight. Her face was young and beautiful; her pale skin seemed paler still above her crimson robe. Jeweled necklaces hung at her throat, gem-studded bracelets circled her wrists, and heavy rings threw back the flickering torches. (*Book of Three* 63)

This is the red goddess of love and battle, as her behavior suggests: having captured Gwydion and Taran in battle, she tries to tempt Gwydion into becoming her consort. When she next appears, the queen is clad in black and wears no jewels; her power is on the wane, as Gwydion discovers. After her failed attempt to regain power over Eilonwy, Achren has nothing left to live for but her hatred of Arawn.<sup>9</sup> In *The High King*, the black-robed Achren seeks her own and Arawn's death, and her powers of divination are the only way to identify the shape-changing Arawn. From the final pages of *The Castle of Llyr* to the end of the series, Achren represents the black goddess of death and divination.

There are other underlying connections to Graves in the characters of Eilonwy and Achren. As a descendant of the Sea King Llyr, Eilonwy has some claim to deity if Graves and other scholars are correct in linking Llyr to the Irish sea god of similar name.<sup>10</sup> Except for Llyr, the names in Eilonwy's genealogy are all feminine, suggesting that she may come from a matrilineal society. Graves believed that the Celts originally had a matriarchal culture and that their supreme deity was the triple goddess. The Sons of Don are also associated with their mother's name rather than their father's. As for Achren, she had ruled all of Prydain before Arawn usurped her throne. As she tells Taran and Eilonwy,

Long before the Sons of Don came to dwell in Prydain, long before the lords of the cantrevs swore allegiance to Math, High King, and Gwydion, his war leader,

it was I who commanded obedience to my rule, I who wore the Iron Crown of Annvin. (*High King* 28)

Achren's past fits very well into Graves's theory that the original Celtic goddess was supplanted by a masculine deity contiguous with a change in society from a matriarchal to a patriarchal culture.

Alexander uses Graves to link Achren to Aranhod. Although the name Achren does not appear in the *Mabinogi*, Charlotte Guest used it in her footnotes when recording the Battle of the Trees that first inspired Alexander to work with the Welsh legends. Alexander, however, chooses to make Achren a major character in three of his books and to associate her with fortresses named Spiral Castle and Caer Colur. Both of these castles come from *The White Goddess*, in which Graves links them to several other fortresses, all associated with Aranhod, who is for Graves another incarnation of the triple goddess.<sup>11</sup> Achren, therefore, is living in two of Aranhod's castles.

Elizabeth Lane has noted the castle connection between Achren and Aranhod, and she points out another resemblance as well: "throughout the Prydain books Achren and Gwydion show a solicitude for each other that would be a little shocking if the old brother-sister relationship didn't come to mind" (26). When questioned on this point, Alexander admitted that the bond between Achren and Gwydion is the result of conscious intent on his part and that he was aware of the suggestions of incest in the relationship between Gwydion and Aranhod in the original tale. There is no suggestion in the *Chronicles* that the two Prydainian characters are related by blood, but a possible love interest is present. Certainly the analogy between Achren and Aranhod is due to authorial intent.

Another character Alexander has drawn from the *Mabinogi* is Arawn, king of the underworld. In "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed" Arawn is one of at least two kings of Annwn until Pwyll slays the rival king and combines the two realms under Arawn's rule. Alexander's Arawn is sole ruler of Annwn (or "Annuvin," as Alexander spells it) with ambitions to rule all of Prydain. Both characters share a shape-changing ability. The original Arawn uses his powers to exchange physical appearances with Pwyll during the year they rule each other's domains, and both Pwyll and Arawn behave honorably during the exchange. The Prydainian Arawn, on the other hand, is less than honorable in using his shape-changing powers. In "The Smith, the Weaver, and the Harper," a story that predates the events in the *Chronicles*, Arawn changes his shape to trick several master craftsmen out of their tools. He succeeds in two instances,

but Menwy the harper, says Alexander, “was a poet and used to seeing around the edge of things” (*Foundling* 86), and therefore manages to discern Arawn’s true shape. In *The High King*, Arawn disguises himself as Taran to steal the sword Dyrnwyn from Gwydion, then later takes on the guise of Gwydion to try to trick Taran into giving up the restored weapon. When Achren tracks Arawn down, she discerns him in the shape of a serpent, and it is in this form that Taran kills him. Serpents, of course, have richer associations in myth than even Robert Graves could number.

Alexander transforms Arawn into a black-hearted villain for the purposes of the story. In many ways Arawn seems to be modeled more on Tolkien’s Sauron than on the domestic warrior-king of the First Branch. Like Sauron, Arawn rules a land of death and decay, corrupts others to his use, and remains for the most part offstage. However, Arawn has none of the grandeur of a fallen angel, whereas Sauron and Milton’s Satan are brothers under the skin. Alexander never seems quite sure of his own mythology; although Arawn is called the Death-Lord and Annvin “the Land of the Dead,” and Arawn has apparently ruled there for many generations, he is never treated by Alexander or his characters as anything more than a powerful and corrupt warrior-king and enchanter. Nowhere is he presented as god or demon of the underworld. In this sense, the Prydainian Arawn is more like the original. The same is true of Achren, who is only a goddess through her Gravesian connections; in the Chronicles of Prydain she is a wicked enchantress, formerly queen of Prydain, who has had a remarkably long life. There is no divinity attached to any characters other than the three witches of Morva, and in their case the divinity must be inferred from the text or culled from Alexander’s introduction to *Taran Wanderer*. Only by coming to the Chronicles after a close reading of *The White Goddess* can a reader see any mythological overtones in Alexander’s books—overtones of which the author himself is often unaware.

Another character borrowed from the Mabinogi is Ellidyr, Prince of Pen-Llarcu. Although his name comes from a list of warriors in “Culhwch and Olwen,” his personality and his role in *The Black Cauldron* are based on the character Efnisien from the Second Branch. Efnisien is the troublemaker who, with no apparent motive, mutilates the Irish horses, kills his own nephew, and finally sacrifices his life in the Cauldron of Rebirth. There are distinct parallels between Ellidyr and Efnisien. Both are princes—younger sons with no inheritance in sight—and both are overly concerned with the dignity they feel is due to their position in life. Whereas Efnisien overreacts to an imagined insult (not

being consulted regarding his sister's marriage), Ellidyr overreacts to being treated as Taran's peer. To Ellidyr, Taran is only a pig-boy, and no fit companion for a noble quest.

Efnisien and Ellidyr share an almost superhuman strength. When Efnisien discovers that the Irish are planning an ambush under the pretence of peace negotiations, he displays his strength:

Efnisien came in ahead of the host of the Island of the Mighty, and scanned the house with fierce, ruthless looks, and he perceived the hide bags along the posts. "What is in this bag?" said he, to one of the Irish. "Flour, friend," said he. He felt about him till he came to his head, and he squeezed his head till he felt his fingers sink into the brain through the bone. (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 35–36)

Efnisien performs the identical operation on all two hundred of the hidden men, including one wearing an armored helmet.

Ellidyr exhibits similar strength after he has caused Taran and his stallion to slip off a ledge:

He [Ellidyr] . . . leaped down, and seized Taran under the arms. With a powerful heave, he lofted Taran like a sack of meal to the safety of the trail. Picking his way toward Melynlas, Ellidyr put his shoulder beneath the saddle girth and strained mightily. With all his strength, little by little, he raised Melynlas until the stallion was able to clamber from the ledge. (*Black Cauldron* 46)

Later in the book, Ellidyr displays the same strength to move the cauldron when it becomes lodged between two river boulders.

Unlike Efnisien, however, Ellidyr does not commit motiveless atrocities. On the contrary, Alexander is at pains to explain the motives for all of Ellidyr's actions. Pride and ill temper, according to Alexander, are at the root of Ellidyr's problems. The prince's main ambition is to gain glory by retrieving the Cauldron of Rebirth, and he is determined to let nothing stand in his way. The only time Ellidyr comes close to Efnisien's manic behavior is when his desire for glory so overcomes him that he turns against Taran and his companions in an insane battle fury reminiscent of Efnisien's attack on the Irish horses.

The closest parallel between Efnisien and Ellidyr is in the manner of their deaths: both sacrifice themselves to destroy the Cauldron of Rebirth. In both cases it is an act of repentance.

And then when Efnisien saw the dead bodies . . . he said in his heart, "Alas, God," said he, "woe is me that I should be the cause of this heap of the men of

the Island of the Mighty. And shame on me," said he, "if I seek no deliverance therefrom." (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 37)

Ellidyr, captured by a treacherous lord along with Taran and his friends, apologizes in a princely fashion for his bad behavior, saying, "I would make up the ill I have done all of you" (*Black Cauldron* 210), then he fights his way to the cauldron and throws himself in. As Ellidyr knows, the cauldron can only be destroyed if a living man climbs into it. This differs from the Mabinogi account, in which Efnisien's great strength is responsible for shattering the cauldron; his death is more of a side effect than a cause: "He stretched himself out in the cauldron, so that the cauldron burst into four pieces, and his heart burst also" (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 37).

In *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy*, Charles Sullivan compares Ellidyr to Efnisien and concludes that both are "extremely self-centered" (57). True enough, but the source of that self-centeredness differs. In the medieval text, Efnisien's actions seem irrational—even insane—and the only explanation offered is that he enjoys causing trouble. Although Ellidyr also causes trouble, it is not intentional, but merely an unavoidable consequence of his pride and ambition.

The final Mabinogi character to have a sizeable role in the Prydain books is Pryderi. Far from being a central character, however, Pryderi appears only in *The High King* as a western king who owes allegiance to the House of Don. Math and Gwydion call on him for help against Arawn's army, but when he arrives at Caer Dathyl, Pryderi announces that he has joined forces with Arawn. With the help of Arawn's deathless warriors, Pryderi destroys Caer Dathyl. Later, when he attempts to kill the enchanter Dallben and seize the Book of Three, Pryderi himself is killed by a bolt of lightning.

Alexander's Pryderi and the medieval character share a number of similarities: both are called "son of Pwyll," both are quick-tempered and ready to fight, both are allied with Arawn, and both are killed through enchantment. Catherine Byfield also notes an element of greed in the Mabinogi figure and a tendency to neglect his princely duties in favor of pursuing personal goals, both of which qualities motivate Alexander's character as well. Since Arawn is a noble character in the medieval text, however, the original Pryderi is not a traitor, and his bond with Arawn is based on friendship rather than on a desire for power. In the Fourth Branch, Gwydion is more of a villain than is Pryderi: Gwydion steals Pryderi's pigs and starts a war in order to help his brother gain access to

the woman he rapes. Gwydion later uses his enchantments to kill Pryderi in what should have been a fair fight.

Elizabeth Lane suggests that Alexander's reversal of events in the battle between Pryderi's forces and those of the Sons of Don is, in a backhanded way, an act of justice to balance the unfair results of the battle in the medieval tale: "Alexander's version gives the story from another point of view, and at the same time vindicates Pryderi's unfair slaying in 'Math' by giving the men of Caer Dathyl their just deserts at his hands" (28). Although this is an intriguing notion, Alexander certainly does not view the destruction of Caer Dathyl as the Sons of Don's just deserts. On the contrary, the Pryderi of the Chronicles is a complete villain—a once-noble lord subverted by Arawn's false promises—and the razing of Caer Dathyl is one of the most tragic events in the series. Pryderi's behavior more likely stems from the traditional alliance between the House of Pwyll and Arawn; since Arawn is a villain in Prydain, Pryderi must necessarily become one also.

The characters mentioned thus far play important roles in the Chronicles of Prydain, but several minor characters also owe their names and occasionally their natures to the Mabinogi. For example, the name Goewin appears, attached to the wife of one of Taran's friends from the Free Commots. She is mentioned only once, and she bears no resemblance at all to the young woman who is sexually assaulted in the Fourth Branch.

Math Son of Mathonwy has a slightly larger role. He appears briefly at the end of *The Book of Three*: "The white-bearded monarch, who looked as old as Dallben and as testy, was even more talkative than Eilonwy" (210). This Math is somewhat comic, in comparison to the dignified and just ruler in the Fourth Branch. When he reappears in *The High King*, Alexander's Math is more like the original—proud, noble, stern—and he dies honorably, defending his castle.

One Mabinogi character who is mentioned several times in the series but never actually appears is Gofannon. In Prydain, Govannon the Lame was a master craftsman who discovered and recorded the secrets of all the crafts and invented magic implements to assist the workmen. This legendary figure is referred to in *Taran Wanderer* and *The High King*. Gofannon is also an offstage character in the Mabinogi: a brother of Gwydion who is responsible for the death of Dylan Eil Ton, Lleu Llaw Gyffes's twin brother. Gofannon Son of Don is mentioned again in "Culhwch and Olwen" in a manner that suggests he is a master blacksmith, and some Celtic scholars believe this figure, along with his siblings, is a euhemerized Welsh god.

Several of the characters Alexander draws from Lady Charlotte Guest's translation come from tales outside the Four Branches or from her scholarly notes.<sup>12</sup> Of all the names and plots taken from Guest's notes, the most important are Hen Wen the oracular pig, Coll, Dallben, and the tale that links the three of them, for this story provides a background for Taran and a central location from which all the adventures can begin. Dallben is a Merlin-like figure, particularly reminiscent of the absent-minded Merlin in T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*. In his recent novel *The Arkadians*, Alexander makes a joking reference to Dallben as the mighty enchanter Dalbenos, who could "start his life afresh as a newborn infant" (75–76).

Dallben's peculiar talent for rebirth hearkens back to another tale which falls outside the eleven stories in the Mabinogion—the story of Taliesin, included by Guest in her translation. The "Hanes Taliesin" serves Alexander in several ways. Besides being adapted to account for Dallben's childhood, the story also provides the character of Taliesin himself. Alexander bases his Chief Bard on the adult Taliesin of the original tale, who was the greatest bard in Wales. Taliesin appears in *The Truthful Harp* and in *The High King*, but his name is mentioned in other volumes as well: in *The Book of Three* as the man who gave Fflewddur Fflam his enchanted harp, and in *The Black Cauldron* as Adaon's father. Like his Welsh forebears, Alexander holds poets and musicians in high regard, so he treats the chief bard with all due respect:

Taliesin's features, though heavily lined, seemed filled with a strange mixing of ancient wisdom and youthfulness. He wore nothing to betoken his rank; and Taran realized there was no need for such adornment. . . . There was, in the Chief Bard's face and voice, a sense of authority far greater than a war leader's and more commanding than a king's. (*High King* 133)

For all his wisdom and nobility, Taliesin does not actually do anything in the Chronicles of Prydain, but he remains in the background as a symbol of authority for would-be harpist Fflewddur Fflam and a representative of a vital aspect of Welsh culture.

Besides most of his names and characters, Alexander also borrows several place names and topographical features from the Mabinogi. Caer Dathyl, the seat of the High King, comes from the Mabinogi, as does its opposite, Annvin. Mona is Ynys Mon, or Anglesey Island, where Branwen was buried near the river Alaw. As further evidence to link Eilonwy to Branwen, the same river appears in *The Castle of Llyr*, separating Caer Colur, where Eilonwy is a prisoner, from the rest of Mona. Snowdonia makes an appearance in the guise of the Eagle Mountains,



but this is more a geographical feature of Wales than a borrowing from the Mabinogi, and, like all of Alexander's geographical borrowings, it has been relocated to suit the author's purposes.<sup>13</sup>

Some of Alexander's plot elements owe their existence to the Four Branches. Although the first book in the Chronicles borrows its story line from Guest's footnotes, volume two—*The Black Cauldron*—draws upon the Second Branch, as does *The Castle of Llyr*, and *Taran Wanderer* uses the craftmaking episode of the Third Branch as part of its organizing structure.

*The Black Cauldron* is the most tightly structured of all five Chronicles of Prydain, and the presence of the cauldron is responsible for much of the clarity of organization. By providing a central image for the book as well as a goal for the quest, the cauldron acts as a focus around which the plot and the characters revolve. The cauldron is also a highly charged mythological symbol of life and death, and the associations attached to it add a depth to the book that is lacking in the other volumes. This is the Cauldron of Rebirth, borrowed from "Branwen Daughter of Llyr" and enlarged upon. In the medieval text, this cauldron is brought to Wales by an Irish exile and later given to the King of Ireland as partial atonement for the mutilation of his horses. The Welsh king Bran explains the cauldron's use to the Irish ruler:

[T]he virtue of the cauldron is this: a man of thine slain to-day, cast him into the cauldron, and by to-morrow he will be as well as he was at the best, save that he will not have power of speech. (Jones and Jones, *Mabinogion* 29)

Possession of this cauldron later gives the Irish a distinct advantage in their battle with the Welsh, until Efnisien destroys it.

In Prydain the cauldron is in Arawn's possession, and he uses it to create a band of Cauldron-born warriors. Unlike the original cauldron, Alexander's Black Crochan is evil. Arawn robs graves to supply his warriors, who are not only mute but deathless. They cannot be killed because they have already been killed. The only limitation on their power is that it weakens the farther they travel away from Annuvín and the longer they stay away.

Alexander has thought long and hard about cauldrons and intends the Black Crochan to carry the full weight of possible mythological connotations. In an article that mentions both Claude Lévi-Strauss and Northrop Frye, Alexander elaborates on cauldrons:

Now, cauldrons of one sort or another are common household appliances in the realm of fantasy. Sometimes they appear, very practically, as inexhaustible

sources of food, or, on a more symbolic level, as a lifegiving source or as a means of regeneration. Some cauldrons bestow wisdom on the one who tastes their brew. In Celtic mythology, there is a cauldron of poetic knowledge guarded by nine maidens, counterparts of the nine Greek muses.

There is also a cauldron to bring slain warriors back to life. The scholarly interpretation—the mythographic meaning—is a fascinating one that links together all the other meanings. Immersion in the cauldron represented initiation into certain religious mysteries involving death and rebirth. The initiates, being figuratively—and perhaps literally—steeped in the cult mysteries, emerged reborn as adepts. In legend, those who came out of the cauldron had gained new life but had lost the power of speech. Scholars interpret this loss of speech as representing an oath of secrecy. (“High Fantasy” 579–80)

The only thing Alexander adds to the myth is to make the cauldron a weapon of evil, and even then, it is only evil because Arawn has corrupted it to his use. The Black Crochan was originally a possession of the witches of Morva. Arawn has merely purchased its use for a time, and when he fails to return it as promised, Orddu, Orwen, and Orgoch reclaim it. As Orddu tells Taran, “The Crochan is useless—except for making Cauldron-born. Arawn has spoiled it for anything else” (*Black Cauldron* 155).

Evil has worked its way into the Crochan so intensely that Taran and his companions can sense it, and the cauldron seems to resist almost consciously their efforts to carry it home:

[I]t seemed as if the ugly, heavy cauldron had gained some strange life of its own. The Crochan, squat and blood-darkened . . . caught on jutting tree limbs, as though eagerly clutching them to itself. . . . For Taran, the Crochan seemed to gain weight with every pace. Its leering, gaping mouth taunted him, and the cauldron dragged at his strength as he heaved and struggled along the ascending trail. (173)

Only Ellidyr’s superhuman strength is able to dislodge the cauldron when it seems to purposefully attack Fflewddur and jam itself between two boulders in the river. The original cauldron is not personified in any way; it is a useful tool, a valuable item for trade, nothing more. By giving his cauldron the shadow of a personality, Alexander has made it more like Tolkien’s ring of power, which corrupted its users and pulled them towards Mordor.

Alexander links the Cauldron of Rebirth to another round magical object from the Mabinogi—a golden bowl that entices Pryderi in the Third Branch. When Taran and his companions discover the Crochan in the witches’ chicken hut and attempt to steal it, they find themselves

stuck fast to it and unable to move. The witches have put a spell on the cauldron—an enchantment that is borrowed from the Third Branch. In that tale Pryderi and Rhiannon are caught by a similar enchantment—one which also robs them of the power of speech. Thus Alexander is resonating once again to the myth of the cauldron.

The other major plot motif borrowed from the Mabinogi also comes from the Third Branch, “Manawydan Son of Llyr.” In that tale, Manawydan and Pryderi take up three different crafts as they move from place to place: first they become saddlemakers, then shieldmakers, then shoemakers. They are so proficient at their work that the local craftsmen in each town conspire to kill them. In the final chapters of *Taran Wanderer*, Taran, ashamed of his recent behavior and seeking a way to do penance, travels to the Free Commots, where he apprentices himself in turn to a blacksmith, a weaver, and a potter. Each time, he hopes he has found his true vocation, but though Hevydd the Smith and Dwyvach the Weaver tell him he has the talent to be a master of their crafts, his heart is not in the work. Only at the wheel of Annlaw Clay-Shaper does Taran find work that stirs his being, yet eventually he realizes he can never be more than a second-rate potter.

Obviously the crafts Alexander chooses for Taran differ from those in the Third Branch, and Taran is never under threat from jealous craftsmen. Only the motif of the three crafts is borrowed from the medieval text. However, Alexander may be borrowing from Kenneth Morris's *Book of the Three Dragons* as well. Although Alexander vaguely recalls reading Morris's book sometime before he began work on the *Chronicles*, he disclaims any conscious influence. Nevertheless, the accounts of Taran's apprenticeships bear a marked resemblance to those of Morris's Manawydan.

The crafts that Manawydan undertakes in *Book of the Three Dragons* are closer to those in the Mabinogi than to Taran's—shoemaking, shieldmaking, and swordmaking—but his approach to the work is similar to Taran's. Both characters apprentice themselves to the greatest masters of their respective trades, learn the craft from the ground up, and produce a final product. Another similarity is that they both keep the final products of their labor, including, in both instances, a sword. Manawydan's purposes are different from Taran's, however; the latter seeks a vocation to add meaning to his life, whereas the former is trying to produce items good enough to be gifts to a god. Manawydan is also more successful than Taran, becoming, in fact, the greatest shoemaker, shieldmaker, and swordmaker in all of Wales.

When examined as a structural element, Taran's apprenticeships are, in the end, a minor part of *Taran Wanderer*, though they give him a lasting legacy. They come at the end of a loosely-linked series of adventures, so they are unable to provide a central plot for the book. In fact, the craft story line detracts from the novel's overall structure. All of the Chronicles are constructed around a quest of some kind: find the pig, find the cauldron, find the princess, find Taran's parentage, find the sword. Yet in the fourth volume, Taran only turns to the Free Commots and the craftsmen when he has given up his quest. His apprenticeships serve to while away the three years between *The Castle of Llyr* and *The High King*, but they do not strengthen the structure of *Taran Wanderer*. However, this is a minor criticism; Alexander's pace never drags, so the craft episodes do not weaken the plot noticeably.

Besides the three substantial motifs of the cauldron, the rescue, and the craft making, Alexander also draws upon the Mabinogi for several less important elements. One motif that may owe as much to Welsh folklore as to any particular Welsh legend is the presence of several giants in the Chronicles. Welsh folklore is so infested with giants that scholars have been unable to document them all. Alexander is well aware of the proliferation of giants in Wales; several of his characters are named after giants mentioned in Guest's footnotes. Glew, the giant in *The Castle of Llyr*, is a shabby representative of the breed; as Fflewddur remarks several times, for a giant, Glew is very small indeed. The Horned King of *The Book of Three* is a more fearsome example. As Arawn's champion the Horned King is only defeated when Gwydion learns his secret name.

Gurgi's magic wallet of food comes from the First Branch of the Mabinogi. In that tale, Rhiannon gives Pwyll a magic bag that cannot be filled, and he uses it, under her instructions, to trick the man she is supposed to marry. A similar hamper of endless provision appears in "Lludd and Llefelys," a tale included in the Mabinogion. These containers are direct ancestors of Gurgi's wallet. At the end of *The Book of Three*, Gwydion gives the ever-hungry Gurgi a royal gift: "To faithful and valiant Gurgi shall be given a wallet of food which shall be always full" (211). The wallet comes in handy in further adventures, although its contents are not all that could be desired. As Eilonwy complains in *The Black Cauldron*,

The food is really quite nourishing, I'm sure, and wonderful to have when you need it. But the truth of the matter is, it's rather tasteless. That's often the trouble with magical things. They're never quite what you'd expect. (58)

Magical items, according to Alexander, are mere props. "In the fantasy world," he says, "as in the real one, people are more important than hardware" ("Truth About Fantasy" 101).

Other than characters, names, and plot elements, Alexander's main borrowing from the Mabinogi may be one of tone. Like the original Four Branches, the *Chronicles of Prydain* are quick-paced and overflowing with humor. Except for an occasional pause for thought in which Taran reflects upon the lessons he is learning, the action is non-stop. The humor, again as in the medieval text, stems from personalities more than events. Alexander's desire in writing the *Chronicles* was to remain true to the spirit rather than to the text of the Welsh legends. At his best he creates a lighthearted tone that reflects the broad good humor of his source. The first page of *The Book of Three*, which I consider one of the best opening passages ever written in children's literature, sets the pace:

Taran wanted to make a sword; but Coll, charged with the practical side of his education, decided on horseshoes. And so it had been horseshoes all morning long. Taran's arms ached, soot blackened his face. At last he dropped the hammer and turned to Coll, who was watching him critically.

"Why?" Taran cried. "Why must it be horseshoes? As if we had any horses!"

Coll was stout and round and his great bald head glowed bright pink. "Lucky for the horses," was all he said, glancing at Taran's handiwork. (17)

Within ten pages, the adventure is at full gallop.

Combining humor and heroic fantasy is a difficult undertaking. Tolkien was not successful at it: his attempts at humor are rather clumsy. Alexander, on the other hand, excels at this task. The quirks and foibles of his characters provide a constant source of amusement, yet the same characters do not seem out of place in their heroic quests. Fflewddur Fflam's truthful harp, which breaks a string with his every exaggeration, becomes a tragic sacrifice in the final volume—a fitting example of Alexander's skill at blending humor and heroism. The humor is warm and rich, but rather obvious (no doubt a concession to the age of Alexander's readers) unlike the medieval text, in which readers often overlook the subtle humor.

Even though Alexander is not by any means retelling the Mabinogi in the *Chronicles of Prydain*, the series could not exist without the Welsh legends. Alexander wanted to capture the spirit of the legends and of the place he called Prydain (the Welsh word from which "Britain" is derived). By his own reckoning, he spent only a few weeks in Wales fifty

years ago, but in those weeks the land and the people stirred his imagination. When he was preparing to write the Prydain books, he even attempted to teach himself Welsh, but his scholarly resources were woefully inadequate. In fact, Alexander's Welsh lessons are reflected only in Hen Wen's grunts; he admits that the pig's "hwoinch, hwch, hwaaw" sounds are his private joke on the Welsh language.

Despite some pressure from his editor to change the Welshness of the personal names, Alexander insisted on retaining every syllable of them, exotic though they seemed to American readers. Names have power, as every fantasy writer knows, and the names Alexander uses also have centuries of legend and folklore behind them to add depth and richness to his heroic fantasy. Borrowing the elements of myth and legend—the stuff Alexander calls “the DNA of literature”—enables a writer to tap into a bottomless well of folk memory (“Fantasy as Images” 442). Alexander has done a superb job of tapping into Welsh folk memory and using it to create his uniquely American fantasy series.

## NOTES

1. Personal interview with Lloyd Alexander, 2 March 1991. Unless otherwise noted, quotes from Alexander are taken from this interview.

2. At the suggestion of Alexander's wife, Janine, when Evaline Ness illustrated *The Truthful Harp* she modeled Fflewddur Fflam, the part-time king and would-be bard, on Alexander himself. This was done without Alexander's knowledge. When he received the first copies of the book, he was both surprised and pleased (Zahorski and Boyer 19).

3. Alexander was a member of a U.S. Army Military Intelligence interrogation team in France from 1944 to 1946.

4. Janet Adam Smith's review of *The Book of Three* in the *New York Review of Books* (3 December 1964) noted a resemblance to T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*, as did Margery Fisher in a review of the same book for *Growing Point* (November 1966). However, the usual accusation was that Alexander was rewriting J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*; Durell refers to this as the “Tolkien Controversy” and says it was stirred up by a review in *School Library Journal* (Durell 53). See, for example, reviews in *Kirkus* (1 March 1968) and *Growing Point* (July 1967).

5. In 1971 Alexander did win the National Book Award for *The Marvelous Misadventures of Sebastian*. The National Book Award is hard to track because it occasionally changes its name or drops a category (such as children's literature) for several years, then picks it up again.

6. Garner uses the same source for some of the names in his first two fantasies: Cadellin Silver-brow and Atlendor appear in the lists of Arthur's warriors in “Culhwch and Olwen.”

7. Alexander did not intend any resemblance between Taran and Pwyll, Taran and Pryderi, or Taran and Lleu Llaw Gyffes. Any such resemblance is accidental and, Alexander states, due to the conventions of the heroic romance. During our interview, he categorically denied basing Taran on any character in the Mabinogi or elsewhere.

8. Interestingly, when Gwydion appears in his princely garb, he wears "a sun-shaped disk of gold" (*Book of Three* 205). Of course, Gwydion is a descendant of Belin the Sun King, but Graves would see this pendant as a symbol of the sun god, a patriarchal replacement for the moon goddess represented in Eilonwy's silver crescent-moon pendant.

9. Alan Garner also uses this plot—the goddess of the waning moon attempting to harness the power of the goddess of the rising moon. In *The Moon of Gomrath*, the evil Morrigan, goddess of the old moon, kidnaps and places a spell upon Susan, the young girl who holds the power of the new moon. Garner and Alexander were not influenced by each other in this plot motif; both writers were resonating to Graves.

10. See, for example, Alwyn and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London: Thames, 1961), and Proinsias MacCana, *Branwen Daughter of Llyr* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1958).

11. This passage in Graves also found its way into Garner's works. The fortress Roland and his siblings have to enter in *Elidor* is the same mythological castle as Achren's seat of power. According to Graves, this place also represents the tomb, "the Dark Tower to which Child Roland came" (85), a connection Garner is extending through his use of the Roland legend.

12. Michael O. Tunnell details most of the sources in *The Prydain Companion*.

13. Unlike Alan Garner, who is scrupulously faithful to geographical realities and to the medieval text of the Mabinogi, Alexander allows his imagination free rein with both. In *The Philadelphia Adventure* he transforms Drexel Hill, his Philadelphia suburb, into an isolated and mountainous wilderness area.

## *Chapter 6*

# The Mabinogi in Fiction, 1970–1992

Alan Garner and Lloyd Alexander set high standards for those who followed them; their Mabinogi-based fantasies won the highest children's literature awards their respective countries have to offer. Although different in style and scope, their works share a high literary quality and a smooth blending of the legendary materials with the author's creative imagination. No doubt their success discouraged other writers from using the Welsh materials: the Mabinogi had been done by masters of the craft. Even Lloyd Alexander hesitated to publish his collection of stories about Prydain for fear people would think he was cashing in on his Newbery success. No children's fiction based on the Four Branches appeared in print in the decade following *The Owl Service* and the *Chronicles of Prydain*. Children's writers continued to rework the Matter of Britain, including the Welsh Arthurian texts, and several authors used the story of Taliesin as a source, but the Four Branches were temporarily



shelved. Interestingly, most of the fiction writers who used Welsh sources in the 1970s were women, and women writers were also responsible for rediscovering the Mabinogi in the 1980s. Susan Cooper, Nancy Bond, Madeleine L'Engle, Frances Thomas, Louise Lawrence, Clare Cooper, Joan Aiken, Grace Chetwin, and Jenny Nimmo have kept Welsh legend alive in children's literature for the past two decades.

In any discussion of Welsh legends in children's literature, the name that is invariably linked to that of Garner and Alexander is Susan Cooper. The British-born Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising* series is a prize-winning fantasy sequence published in five volumes between 1966 and 1977. In 1976 the Welsh Arts Council presented the first annual Tir na n-Og Award to Cooper's *The Grey King* as the best English book with an authentic Welsh background.<sup>1</sup> *The Grey King*, which was the fourth book in the series, won the Newbery Medal that same year. Two years later the last book in the series, *Silver on the Tree*, also won the Tir na n-Og Award. Despite the Welsh setting, however, the assumption many critics make that Cooper is drawing on the same traditional materials as Garner and Alexander is false. Only these two books are set in Wales, and none of the books contains any notable borrowings from the Mabinogi. Even the larger collection of Welsh tales—the Mabinogion—contributes little to Cooper's series.

The first book, *Over Sea, Under Stone*, is set in Cornwall and centers around a struggle between good and evil for the possession of an ancient grail. The second volume, *The Dark Is Rising*, after which the series is named, is set in Buckinghamshire and uses a few Celtic elements, such as the circular concept of time: past, present, and future coexist and intermingle. Like the hounds of Annwn, the supernatural dogs who run with the Wild Hunt at the end of the second book are white with red ears, and the author mentions the Eagle of Gwernabwy as the oldest creature in the world—a reference taken from "Culhwch and Olwen." For the most part, however, *The Dark Is Rising* builds on a hodgepodge of mythic references drawn from several different cultures rather than from Welsh folklore in particular. There is one specific reference to a legendary Welsh figure, which occurs in a magical tome with the very English name of *The Book of Gramarye*:

I have plundered the fern  
Through all secrets I spie;  
Old Math ap Mathonwy  
Knew no more than I. (*Dark Is Rising* 94)

Math ap Mathonwy is the wizard/king after whom the Fourth Branch is named.

The setting for *Greenwitch*, the third volume of the series, is once again Cornwall, and the plot is built around local Cornish folk legends rather than Welsh materials. At the end of the book there is a prophecy that contains a line of Welsh, but it has no connection with the Mabinogi.

*The Grey King* and *Silver on the Tree* are the final volumes and the ones most likely to touch on Welsh legend, since they are set in Wales. Again, however, Cooper avoids the Mabinogi as a source, approaching it only as near as "Culhwch and Olwen," the Arthurian legends, and the Welsh triads.<sup>2</sup> In *The Grey King* she uses the folk motif of the oldest animals. Although this motif appears in "Culhwch and Olwen," Cooper uses a variant taken from the Welsh triads. A triad, as the term suggests, is a group of three related items. The oldest Welsh manuscripts contain lists of triple groupings related to legendary characters and events. Welsh scholars believe that the triads were mnemonic devices used to teach traditional tales to bards-in-training. The Mabinogi contains references to numerous triads. For example, Gwydion is called one of the Three Gold Shoemakers, as is Manawydan, and Dylan Eil Ton's death at the hand of his uncle is called one of the Three Unhappy Blows. In *The Grey King* two of the riddles Will Stanton and Bran Davies have to answer in order to gain possession of a magic harp are based on Welsh triads: one concerns the Three Generous Men of the Island of Britain and the other is about the Three Elders of the World, who in this variant are the Owl of Cwm Cawlwyd, the Eagle of Gwernabwy, and the Blackbird of Celli Gadarn.

Also in *The Grey King*, Cooper introduces a dog named Cafall; this was the name of King Arthur's dog in "Culhwch and Olwen." In some Welsh sources, Cafall is the name of Arthur's horse. Like Arthur himself, Cafall is immortalized in several Welsh place names. Cooper uses Cafall as the main link between Bran Davies and his natural father, King Arthur.

Except for these few links to the Mabinogion, Cooper depends more on local legends than on national ones in her last two volumes. In *Silver on the Tree* she uses a local legend from Aberdovey about a drowned kingdom, and in *The Grey King* she leans heavily upon a legend from North Wales that refers to mountain mist as "the breath of the Grey King." The latter legend was recorded as early as 1896 by the Reverend Elias Owen:

In Carmarthenshire the spirit of the mist is represented, not as a shrivelled up old woman, but as a hoary headed old man, who seats himself on the hill sides, just where the clouds appear to touch them, and he is called *Y Brenhin Llwyd*, or The Grey King. (Owen 142)

Cooper uses almost nothing of the Mabinogi in her books, despite an acknowledgement in *The Dark Is Rising* stating that her debt to the Mabinogion and to Robert Graves is "limitless." Graves's influence is easier to see, since he too tended to mix his mythologies. *The Dark Is Rising* itself contains little of Graves; *Greenwitch* is the more Gravesian volume, dealing as it does with sea goddesses and mystic feminine rites.

Cooper's strength, from a folklore perspective, lies in her use of local folk legend rather than in her borrowings from the broader field of myth and legend. The use of local legends imbues the landscape with personality and is thus a powerful ingredient in Cooper's gift for geographical description, which rivals Alan Garner's. Just as Garner captures the isolation and claustrophobia of the Welsh valleys in *The Owl Service*, Cooper recreates the sense of brooding menace that hovers over Cader Idris, the Grey King of her title.

Cooper's Welsh settings are powerful enough to have convinced literary critics that she is working with the same ancient Welsh materials as her predecessors, but although she uses some Welsh characters and local folklore, she never gets closer to the Mabinogi than the Matter of Britain. As a writer, Cooper excels at evoking character and place; her main weakness is an inability to describe fantasy scenes to the same high standard. Given her particular talents, she might find realistic fiction to be her metier. However, Cooper has continued to pursue her interest in Celtic folk legends in her recent work: in the past decade she has written a trilogy of picture books retelling a Welsh folktale (*The Silver Cow*), an Irish tale (*The Selkie Girl*), and a Scottish ballad (*Tam Lin*).

Another writer who was working with Welsh materials during the 1970s is Nancy Bond, an American who spent a year studying in mid-Wales and was so struck by the country and its legends that she was inspired to write her first book, *A String in the Harp*, which won the second Tir na n-Og Award in 1977. Bond based her fantasy on the legend of Taliesin, a tale peripheral to those in the Mabinogion. The protagonists are American children whose father is an exchange professor at the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth. One of the children finds the key to Taliesin's harp, which creates a link across time to legendary Wales.

Bond is a capable writer, but she does not have Susan Cooper's gifts for description and characterization. Although *A String in the Harp* is a good book, it is not an excellent one. Bond's psychological concerns are too blatant; her handling of them is not as subtle and sophisticated as Alan Garner's handling of similar themes. However, Bond does a superb job of capturing the sense of cultural displacement foreigners experience when they first arrive in a new country.

Madeleine L'Engle has also worked with traditional Welsh material. In *Fantasy Fiction and Welsh Myth*, Kath Filmer-Davies devotes an entire chapter to L'Engle's *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, a sequel to L'Engle's critically admired fantasy *A Wrinkle in Time*. According to Filmer-Davies, L'Engle draws heavily on Welsh myth for her plot, which involves the descendants of two Welsh princes who emigrated to America. Rather than adapting myth, however, L'Engle is using an old Welsh legend about a Welsh prince who discovered America three hundred years before Columbus. L'Engle turns the legend into a version of the Cain and Abel story and shows how individual choices can affect the future of entire nations. The legend of Madoc discovering America is little known outside of Wales and has no connection to the tales collected in the Mabinogion. The only reference to the Mabinogi in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* is a family legend of descent in Ireland from an English princess named Branwen. Branwen, of course, was a Welsh princess rather than an English one, but family legends do tend to get garbled as they are passed down through the generations. Although *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* contains Welsh characters and history, it does not draw upon the Mabinogi to any extent. Like Cooper, L'Engle uses the Mabinogion only peripherally.

Another series based on ancient Welsh legends appeared in the early 1980s. Frances Thomas, a British writer with a Welsh heritage, produced a trilogy called *The Blindfold Track*, based on the Taliesin legend. The first and third volumes, *The Blindfold Track* and *The Region of the Summer Stars*, won Tir na n-Og awards.

Like Cooper, Bond, and L'Engle, Thomas does not draw much from the Four Branches. On the last page of *The Blindfold Track* there is a brief reference to Blodeuwedd, the woman made of flowers. A few pages earlier, an ancient but respected witch helps the young Taliesin discover his true nature, and she tells him:

Soon I will be dead. And with me will die all the powers that have been in my body and in those who came before me. We have had many names, some that we tell to men, some that we keep hidden. We have been called Arianrod of the

Silver Wheel, and Morgan the Enchanted, and Olwen of the White Track. And we have been called Cerridwen, and that is perhaps the oldest of our names. (193)

The tone and content of this passage suggest that Frances Thomas is familiar with Robert Graves's concept of the White Goddess, since she mentions some of the names he associates with the goddess. "Arianrod" is that same Aranrhod who fails to qualify as virgin footholder in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi. Olwen is one of the title characters of "Culhwch and Olwen."

Bond and Thomas may have decided to use the Taliesin legend in order to avoid comparisons to Garner and Alexander; a similar motivation may be behind L'Engle's use of the Madoc legend. *The Owl Service* and the *Chronicles of Prydain* were towering achievements in children's fantasy, and no one wished to court comparison to such milestones. Since neither Garner nor Alexander used the story of Madoc and both made sparing use of the Taliesin story, these two Welsh tales were almost virgin territory for fantasy writers. At the same time, they conjured up the same rich mythic associations as the other ancient Welsh tales.

The Mabinogi began to reenter children's fiction in the 1980s. In the first two years of the decade several books that borrowed elements from the Four Branches appeared in print. One British novel that builds on the Graves-Garner tradition is Louise Lawrence's *The Earth Witch*, a fantasy for young adults in which a teenaged Welsh boy unwittingly falls in love with the triple goddess. As the story opens, the narrative voice conjures up the legendary past:

Strange are the legends told of Mynydd Blaena in dusty books and half-forgotten languages . . . how Pwyll of Dyfed strayed into the underworld, how the black hounds hunted out of Annwn and the heroes died when the land was magic in a dangerous time. (2)

As the atmosphere thickens over a brooding landscape, Owen, the Welsh boy, tells his two English friends about the ancient goddess:

You haven't heard of her? Rhiannon of the underworld? Blodeuwedd of the owls? Angharad of the lake? Cerridwen the shape changer? She has many names but it is all one woman. Once in the earth they worshipped her. For her the black knight was slain. For her men died. Who are you to go through her lands ignoring her? (22)

These passages are redolent of Robert Graves, as anyone familiar with *The White Goddess* would notice immediately. On the other hand, the complex relationships among Lawrence's three teenaged protagonists, as well as their dialogue, are reminiscent of *The Owl Service*. The resemblances are not accidental, according to the author, nor are they a deliberate attempt to emulate Graves and Garner.<sup>3</sup> Louise Lawrence writes that she had "read and admired" *The Owl Service* several years before she wrote *The Earth Witch*:

I thought, at that time, it was the ultimate achievement in power and style. . . . But yes, undoubtedly Garner was influential.

More directly influential was Robert Graves's *White Goddess* and Mabinogion itself. I was deeply involved with both books at the time as well as Carl Jung's work on Archetypes and various feminist writings—I forget which ones. . . . But that I return again and again for my own delight to *The Owl Service*, *The White Goddess*, the Mabinogion and Jung's works suggests that their influence still remains potent.

Both the style and the plot of *The Earth Witch* indicate that Graves and Garner are the two strongest influences at work. Rather than building on a specific tale from the Mabinogi as Garner does, however, Lawrence constructs her story around Graves's theme of the ancient matriarchal triple goddess who demands blood sacrifice for the bounty of the land. Garner uses this same theme in *The Owl Service*, but it serves as an underlying layer to the story rather than as the main plot.

If Lawrence has a particular Welsh tale in mind, it must be "The Lady of the Fountain," one of the Arthurian tales in the Mabinogion. The name of her main character, his wasting illness, and references to the black knight all come from this tale. The Earth Witch draws her water from the fountain of the title, and she tells Owen that she is the "Lady of the lake and fountain, lady of owls and flowers" (69). The lake and fountain are Arthurian, but the owls and flowers refer to Blodeuwedd, both as a character in the Fourth Branch and as the powerful goddess in *The Owl Service*. The Earth Witch herself, however, is all Graves, down to the black crow and black sow that are associated with her. Even the witch's dog is black, though the original hounds of Annwn are white with red ears.

*The Earth Witch* is a paean to Garner and Graves; Lawrence's admiration for their work is evident throughout the book. Garner's influence extends beyond style and character, but Lawrence carefully avoids treading on his territory; she selects bits of Graves and the Mabinogion

that Garner has not used. As literature, *The Earth Witch* suffers somewhat from its author's admiration for Garner: she speaks too often in an imitation of Garner's voice rather than in her own. However, Kath Filmer-Davies's assertion that Lawrence has no feel for Welsh landscapes is too harsh (and her assumption that Lawrence is American is incorrect). Lawrence has spent considerable time in Wales and knows how to evoke the power of place, particularly when mountains are present.

In the same year that Lawrence's book appeared, another British author came out with the first book of a trilogy set in Wales. Clare Cooper was writing for younger children rather than for teenagers, so the books are simpler in style and plot than Lawrence's. *The Black Horn*, the first book of the series, does not use the Mabinogi at all. Like the works of Cooper, Bond, and Lawrence, it is a fantasy set in Wales that deals with the forces of ancient legend. In *The Black Horn*, a schoolboy named Simon Jones discovers that he has inherited magical powers. In the sequel, *A Wizard Called Jones*, the author introduces a dog named Cafall (the name of King Arthur's dog in "Culhwch and Olwen"). Cafall supposedly comes from Annwn. This reference to the Welsh Underworld is the only thing in the book that may be borrowed from the Mabinogi.

The third book in the series, *The Kings of the Mountain*, borrows more from the Four Branches. The cauldron from "Branwen Daughter of Llyr" figures in the plot, as an Irish magician arrives to reclaim it from a Welsh family of ancient and royal lineage. The author invents a historical manuscript she calls *The Myddfai Historian* to explain the origin of the cauldron:

There is in Erin a cauldron Similar to thatte ycleppte Ye Cauldron of Life, which being the gift of grette Bran to the huSband of his SiSter Rhiannon. TheSe cauldrones in ye oldenne days did makke ye daed to live again. Whool armies on being Slaine were putte therin and did come oot not as corpSes but as livinge, fightinge men. (*Kings of the Mountain* 72)

*The Myddfai Historian* seems to confuse the First and Second Branches of the Mabinogi—in the original medieval text Bran's sister is Branwen and Rhiannon is Pwyll's and later Manawydan's wife—but the fictional historian is accurate about the uses of the cauldron.

Clare Cooper's books are run-of-the-mill fantasies with nothing particularly memorable or original about them. In contrast, Joan Aiken's *The Stolen Lake*, published in 1981 (the same year as *The Black Horn* and Lawrence's *The Earth Witch*), abounds in lively creativity. Part of

the Dido Thwaite series, *The Stolen Lake* recounts Dido's adventures in South America on her way back to England from her American sojourn in *Nightbirds on Nantucket*. Aiken is well-known for her alternate time line, in which the Stuart dynasty remains in power in Britain and the Hanoverian pretender plots to usurp the throne. In *The Stolen Lake* Aiken extends her alternate history to include all of South America. Now known as Roman America, the continent was settled by Roman Britons who left their homeland after the Battle of Dyrham in 577. Aiken's Roman Americans have Welsh names, dress in Welsh costume, and are acting out the Arthurian legend of the once and future king as Queen Ginevra (Guinevere) awaits the return of her husband.

Aiken's reenactment of the Matter of Britain is original and humorous. Ginevra is a bloated vampire, keeping herself alive for centuries by draining the life out of young girls. One of the mates from Dido's ship turns out to be King Arthur, and Dido herself pulls Arthur's sword from the lake. Aiken mixes Welsh, Arthurian, and Aztec legends with Victorian mores and manners to create a unique adventure for Dido and her friends.

Although the author's primary interest is in the Arthurian tales, she borrows a few items from the Mabinogion. Like several of her predecessors, she draws on "Culhwch and Olwen" for a list of the oldest creatures in the world—"the Ousel of Cilgwri, the Stag of Redynvre, the Owl of Cwm Cawlwyrd, the Eagle of Gwern Abwy" (Aiken 258)—but Aiken places them on display in the Zoological Garden in Bath Regis. Bran, a bard and magician, tells Dido that Arthur will marry again and have three children; two of the names for the children are taken from the Mabinogi: "Llyr" and "Penardun." In the medieval text, Llyr and Penarddun, who do not actually appear as characters, are the parents of Bran, Branwen, and Manawydan. Aiken's reawakened Arthur also answers to the name "Gwydion." There is a waterfall called "Rhiannon," and the lake from which Dido pulls the sword is Lake Arianrod. The characters include several witches who have the power to turn themselves into owls; this is a reference to Blodeuwedd's punishment. The people of Roman America have a legend that Arrabe mountain belongs to Arawn, king of the Black World. Despite these references, however, the Mabinogi is not a major source for *The Stolen Lake*, but rather part of the mythological backdrop for a tale that is more adventure than fantasy.

In 1985 Grace Chetwin, an Englishwoman living in America, published a fantasy that touched on the Mabinogi. *Out of the Dark World* is



about an adolescent who uses her psychic powers to rescue a cousin from imprisonment inside a computer. Meg, the heroine, has her Welsh grandmother's second sight and an attachment to the legends of Wales:

Meg decided to read for a while. She crossed to her bookshelf, picked out a favorite book, a collection of ancient Welsh bardic tales called *The Mabinogion*. She turned the pages until she came to the story she like best: the tale of Prince Pwyll of Dyfed and his bride, Rhiannon, who some said was also Morgan le Fay, King Arthur's witch sister. Meg just reached the best bit where Pwyll first saw Morgan le Fay in her "garment of shining gold brocaded silk," riding toward him on a "big fine pale white horse," when she saw that it was time for lights out. (5)

Chetwin is interested in an Arthurian connection here. Morgan le Fay does not appear in *The Mabinogion* and her name is distinctly French, but Chetwin wants to make her Welsh. Morgan later appears in the story as one of Meg's psychic guides, wearing her brocaded silk and riding a big white horse.

The first writer after Lloyd Alexander to use the Mabinogi in a more substantial way was Jenny Nimmo, an Englishwoman who settled in Wales with her family. Marcus Crouch, one of the foremost British critics in children's literature, considers Nimmo to be "one of the three or four outstanding figures to have emerged in the world of children's books in the last half-decade" (Crouch 22). This assessment is based primarily on Nimmo's Snow Spider trilogy: *The Snow Spider*, *Emlyn's Moon*, and *The Chestnut Soldier*. *The Snow Spider* won both the Tir na n-Og Award and the Smarties Grand Prix.<sup>4</sup> BBC Television has serialized all three books of the series.

Before her marriage Nimmo worked for BBC Television's *Jackanory* program for children, and one of the tales she produced for the show was a retelling of "Culhwch and Olwen." The Welsh actor who provided the voice-over for that program was responsible for introducing Nimmo to the Mabinogion. In the end, she says, she read the whole book:

And that's when I came across Gwydion and Math Son of Mathonwy and was just bowled over. And I think why he [Gwydion] caught hold of my imagination is that on two occasions he is described as the best storyteller in all the world. That is the bit that fascinated me.<sup>5</sup>

Nimmo had the notion of writing a story in which Gwydion would be presented as a little boy—an idea that sparked the first book of the series.

In that book, *The Snow Spider*, a young Welsh boy discovers on his ninth birthday that he is descended from Math and Gwydion and has inherited their magical powers. He uses his newfound magic to discover what happened to his older sister, who disappeared some years previously. *Emlyn's Moon*, the second volume, tells the story of a middle child who develops her own creative talent while helping a classmate find his mother. In the final book of the series, *The Chestnut Soldier*, the child protagonists of the first two books help free a soldier from demonic possession. The trilogy depends on the Mabinogi for its basic concept of a youthful Gwydion, and it also borrows several characters and plot motifs from the Welsh tales.

The main continuing character in the series is the boy Gwyn, whose real name is Gwydion. Gwyn is a descendant of Math and Gwydion, but at the same time he is a reincarnation of Gwydion. When he employs his magical powers in times of stress, Gwyn seems to become Gwydion, growing taller and older and more powerful. The girl Nia is the only one who ever sees the transformation:

[Gwyn] had gone and something else was where he should have been: a frosty tree stump: a man kneeling under a cloak that reflected all the bright shades in the sky, and hair silver with sunlight.

There were words in the air, rising and falling like insistent, monotonous music. Names perhaps: Math, Lord of Gwynedd, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy. Names in the air, sung like a sacrament. (*Emlyn's Moon* 147)

"Math, Lord of Gwynedd, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy" is the incantation Gwyn uses whenever he performs magic. In Nimmo's eyes all three of these legendary men are wizards; theirs is a family of wizards, and Gwyn is descended from all three men. In the medieval text, however, Gilfaethwy, who is Gwydion's brother, lacks any special powers. In fact, Gilfaethwy's role in the Fourth Branch is that of a rapist who is punished for his crime. When Nimmo decided she needed three names for the incantation, she chose Gilfaethwy rather than Gofannon, the other brother who is mentioned in the Mabinogi, because there is obviously a close bond between Gwydion and Gilfaethwy. In the Welsh text, Gwydion single-handedly starts a war in order to help Gilfaethwy gain access to Goewin, the virgin Gilfaethwy rapes.

Gwydion himself appears in Nimmo's third book: Gwyn briefly travels back in time to talk to his ancestor. Gwydion is presented as a storyteller who is "not above a bit of wickedness, as Gwyn tells his

grandmother (*Chestnut Soldier* 150). Gwydion even refers indirectly to his punishment for setting up the rape his brother committed:

Gwydion laughed. "My uncle Math turned me into a stag once, for misbehaving, and on another occasion a wild sow." He threw back his head and gave a delighted guffaw. "Imagine," he roared, "a sow. I can't tell you what it was like. I found myself relishing, well, you wouldn't believe it!" (*Chestnut Soldier* 142)

The only active part Gwydion takes in the story is to give Gwyn several magical implements and to partly possess the boy in the final confrontation with the demon. Most of the time Gwydion remains a distant ancestor. Gwyn's name, his appearance (identical to Gwydion's), and his occasional transformations are the only evidence to suggest a closer identification of the two. Certainly their characters differ. As even Gwyn can see, Gwydion cannot be trusted (witness Gwydion's uninvited presence in Gwyn's body), whereas Gwyn himself is completely trustworthy. Gwyn's only failing is a small streak of irresponsibility—more a fault of his age than of his character. As the series begins, Gwyn is celebrating his ninth birthday, and towards the end of the third book, he turns thirteen; in those four years he matures in many ways and learns to handle his powers responsibly. Gwyn is never the trickster that Gwydion is, and the younger magician even manages to keep his powerful ancestor in check during the encounter with the demon. Gwyn does, however, share Gwydion's storytelling ability, at least in Nia's eyes:

Gwyn was the best storyteller she knew, describing events with such passionate meaning that heroes and heroines seemed to leap before her, drawing armies and castles behind them, in a dazzling atmosphere that quite excluded all her immediate surroundings. (*Chestnut Soldier* 46)

Gwyn also performs some of the same enchantments as his ancestor. The original Gwydion had once conjured up a ship out of seaweed; Gwyn uses the same spell to conjure up a ship from another planet. Gwydion transformed Lleu Llaw Gyffes from an eagle into a man and Blodeuwedd from a woman into an owl. Although Gwyn does nothing that dramatic, he manages to turn his friend Alun into a small bird to save his life. Whereas Gwydion could conjure up entire armies, the best Gwyn can do is two soldiers in ancient garb. However, Gwyn is still young in age and power, and one of Nia's prophetic visions shows him as a grown man "glowing with secret knowledge" (*Chestnut Soldier* 161).

Gwyn is a direct descendant of Gwydion through Gwydion's son. Although Nimmo does not name this son, the passage Gwyn's grandmother translates from the Mabinogi comes from the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes. Apparently Nimmo is aware of the ambiguous relationship between Gwydion and Lleu in the original manuscript, because a surface reading of any modern translation would show only that Lleu is Gwydion's nephew. The hints of possible incest are extremely subtle in the medieval text. Nimmo simplifies the relationship to father and son with no mention of any other connection.

The second main character in the series is Nia Lloyd. Although Nia makes no appearance in the Mabinogi, she has a connection to the Second Branch. Her family's ancestral homestead is called Ty Llyr (the House of Llyr), and her mother descends directly from the Children of Llyr—Bran, Branwen, and Manawydan. Because of this genealogy, Nia has inherited a small streak of magic herself; she catches rare glimpses of the future and she has a finely honed intuition. Hers is a magic of the heart, whereas Gwyn's enchantments are of the intellect, but both children are instrumental in rescuing souls in peril.

Gwyn's grandmother seems to be a witch of sorts, although she claims the magic skipped her generation. She can brew up a potion or two, read the Tarot cards, and dispense mysterious hints to Gwyn and Nia. Nain, as Gwyn calls her (Welsh for "grandmother"), dresses like a gypsy and grows exotic plants. Not until the final volume does the reader find out her given name is Rhiannon. Unlike the Rhiannon of the Mabinogi, however, Nain is not associated with horses or birds, except for her parrot earrings and a caged canary. If Nain has any magic in her, it is an earthy brand: "Birds flocked to Rhiannon Griffiths' fruitful meadow, bees found untainted pollen there, ladybirds thrived, rodents happily multiplied" (*Chestnut Soldier* 29). About the only quality Nain shares with the original Rhiannon is a sharp tongue. Nevertheless, the name is an interesting coincidence, although Nimmo claims she was not consciously attempting to make a connection.

Besides Gwydion, the other main character Nimmo borrows from the Four Branches is Efnisien. Efnisien fascinated her the first time she read the Mabinogi and she has continued to be intrigued by his actions. In the Second Branch, Efnisien mutilates the King of Ireland's horses and throws his own nephew into a fire, having no apparent motive for either atrocity. In the Snow Spider trilogy, Efnisien appears as a demon trapped in a broken toy horse, "a mockery of a horse, with severed ears and tail, blank lidless eyes and teeth bared forever in what could only be

despair" (*Chestnut Soldier* 12). Obviously this toy represents the Irish horses that Efnisien mutilated in "Branwen Daughter of Llyr." All Gwyn knows at first is that the horse is evil, until his sister makes a suggestion:

if you are Gwydion, the magician from a legend, perhaps the broken horse is from a legend too. Perhaps a demon from a true story was trapped inside the broken horse by magic, to keep its evil locked up, safe, away from the world. (*Snow Spider* 114–15)

When Gwyn reads the story of Branwen, he realizes the demon is Efnisien.

In *The Snow Spider* Gwyn unwittingly frees Efnisien from the horse and has to cast a spell to recapture him. Nia's brother Alun, who has also been trapped in the spell, catches a glimpse of Efnisien:

He had red hair and he was dressed all in kind of bright stuff: jewelry an' that, with a cloak an' a gold belt with a big sword in it. An' he was beating at the bars with his fists, tearing at them, banging his head on them, an' yelling. (*Snow Spider* 134)

Like Gwydion, this other legendary character appears in medieval garb.

Efnisien's escape from the broken horse is only a subplot in *The Snow Spider*, but his second escape forms the main plot of *The Chestnut Soldier*. In that book, Efnisien takes over the soul of Nia's cousin, Evan Llyr, and compels Nia's sister Catrin and her boyfriend to reenact the story of Branwen. Although Evan is definitely possessed by Efnisien, in another sense he *is* Efnisien, just as Gwyn is both a descendant and a reincarnation of Gwydion. Evan Llyr is not really a Llyr at all; he is the son of Mrs. Lloyd's half-brother, whose father is unknown. Efnisien too is a half-brother to the Children of Llyr, and the name of his father is never mentioned. Like Efnisien, Evan had a brother who was his opposite in temperament; when the brother died in a childhood accident, Evan adopted his personality. Both Evan and Efnisien are professional soldiers—war heroes in a way—who have served bravely in Northern Ireland. All the events in Evan's life parallel those of Efnisien. Similarly, just as Gwyn can sense the horse is evil, he also senses a wrongness about Evan even over the phone, and this is long before the demon prince takes possession of Evan.

Evan's personality reflects Efnisien's: he stirs up strife between sisters and friends, indulges in thoughtless cruelties, and succumbs to sudden, inexplicable rages during which his behavior becomes irrational.

Nimmo has obviously chosen Evan's name for its similarity to Efnisien; Evan is the closest modern equivalent to a name no longer used in Wales. Nimmo also changes the relationship between the Children of Llyr and the Sons of Don. In the medieval text they have no familial connection, but in *The Chestnut Soldier* Gwydion, who is responsible for locking the demon into the toy horse, claims Efnisien as a nephew. Penarddun, the mother of the Children of Llyr as well as of Efnisien and his brother, is Gwydion's sister in Nimmo's version of the tale, and Gwydion's brother Gilfaethwy is the one who gave the toy horse to Gwydion. Thus the events in *The Chestnut Soldier* become very much a family affair for Gwyn as for Nia.

Because of Efnisien's presence, other characters from the Second Branch are also conjured up in modern personalities. Nia's older sister Catrin acts out the part of Branwen as the tale unfolds. Like Branwen, Catrin is the most beautiful girl in Wales. When Evan arrives, he causes a rift between Catrin and her Irish boyfriend, Michael McGoohan. In the reenactment of Efnisien's story, Michael is cast as Matholwch, the Irish king who marries Branwen. Not only are the names "Michael" and "Matholwch" similar, but like Matholwch, Michael McGoohan is associated with horses. Although the modern political situation prevents Michael from being king of Ireland, he is a wealthy and pampered Irish lad used to getting what he wants—in this instance Catrin.

Nimmo deftly weaves together the ancient tale and the modern one. Using the political situation in Northern Ireland as a parallel to the story of Branwen is a brilliant creative stroke. Evan's army service in Northern Ireland provides a motive for his hostility towards Michael, and his recent encounter with IRA bombs explains his irrational psychological state. At the same time, these links to the army and to Ireland draw a clear parallel between the lives of Evan and Efnisien, so that Evan's experiences explain Efnisien's behavior even as Efnisien's experiences explain Evan's actions.

Efnisien and Gwydion are Nimmo's major debt to the Mabinogi, but she also borrows plot elements, mainly from the Second and Fourth Branches. One of the gifts Gwyn receives magically from Math is a silver pipe through which Gwyn hears voices from a distant world. Nain recognizes the significance of the pipe: "Even when men whispered, Math could hear them; he could hear voices beyond any mortal ear! The pipe is from him!" (*Snow Spider* 56). The original Math of the Fourth Branch had the same unusual gift of hearing.

When Gwyn uses Gwydion's seaweed spell, he conjures up a spaceship rather than a sea vessel, but the spaceship comes from another world that represents Annwn, the Land of the Dead. Gwyn's sister Bethan, who had disappeared four years earlier, lives on that other planet. Although Nimmo does not explicitly state it in the book, Bethan is really dead; the ship and planet create a metaphor for heaven that will not distress young readers. The same ship and otherworld figure in *Emlyn's Moon*, although the metaphor is more difficult to see. In the second book Gwyn's cousin Emlyn loses all interest in life and is almost snatched away to the otherworld, where Emlyn believes his mother waits, but Gwyn and Nia save him at the last moment. The far planet and its pale childlike inhabitants bear no resemblance to the robust Welsh Annwn and its denizens; the connection lies in the representation of a mythological Land of the Dead.

This mysterious otherworld does not figure in *The Chestnut Soldier*, but other Mabinogi elements are present. Gwydion appears in person to give Gwyn a magic wand. This is the same wand Gwydion used to conjure up illusory horses and hounds, to create Blodeuwedd, to restore Lleu Llaw Gyffes to human shape, and to transform Blodeuwedd into an owl. Gwyn uses the wand to fight Efnisien and cast him out of Evan's body.

The main image that recurs throughout *The Chestnut Soldier* is the mutilated horse. Not only does it appear as the broken toy in which Efnisien is imprisoned, but also in the destruction of a little boy's toy animals, the death of Michael McGoohan's horse, and the disfigurement of a valuable hand-carved unicorn. Gwyn's uncle, the artist who made the unicorn, describes the vandalism:

It was deliberate, careful mutilation! . . . They defiled my creature. Hacked at its ears, its eyes and its tail; cracked my unicorn's lovely gold eyes. (*Chestnut Soldier* 70)

This parallels exactly the way Efnisien mutilated Matholwch's horses. The recurring image of a disfigured horse represents all of Efnisien's inexplicable actions as well as Evan's, and it is also a thread that runs through the trilogy as a whole. When the tortured souls of Efnisien and Evan finally find peace, the toy horse is restored to its original unmutated state.

For Nimmo, the mutilated horse is a symbol of psychic disfigurement; psychological factors affect Evan as much as demonic possession. The associations reach even deeper in Wales: a horse was a Celtic warrior's

most valued possession. Furthermore, one of the Celtic deities apparently was a horse goddess (often linked to Rhiannon), and archeologists have unearthed figures of horses associated with various godlike beings.

The cauldron of rebirth also appears in the series, but it is specific to *The Chestnut Soldier*. Just as Efnisien uses his great strength to destroy the cauldron, so Evan has used his to rescue several of his men from a booby-trapped building. Even though Evan was trapped in the building when the IRA bombs exploded, he miraculously escaped physical injury. As well as representing the cauldron, this trap parallels the Irish ambush in “Branwen.” Unlike Efnisien, however, Evan did not die in the cauldron, but as Nimmo explains, the demon prince has supernaturally protected Evan in order to make use of him later. Evan does eventually “die” when Gwyn/Gwydion casts him into a flooded river. In this instance, the river represents the Underworld, for Nia sees Efnisien and his army pass into eternal rest at long last beneath the water, and the river casts up Evan to a new life.

*The Chestnut Soldier* is the book most tied to the Mabinogi, but the Welsh tales are a background for the entire trilogy. Almost as if to verify her borrowings from the Mabinogi, Nimmo quotes several passages in *The Snow Spider*: Gwydion and the seaweed ship, and the story of Efnisien. Even though Nimmo says she used the Jones and Jones translation, her version of the tales is simplified and somewhat altered. There are no quotes in *Emlyn’s Moon*, only references to a teacher discussing old legends and to Nia’s mother reading them to her younger children. In *The Chestnut Soldier* Gwyn reads almost the complete tale of Branwen to Nia.

Although *Emlyn’s Moon* does not borrow a great deal from the Four Branches, it is indebted to a book that has become linked to the Mabinogi—Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess*. Nimmo, like Garner and Alexander and numerous other fantasists, is an admirer of Graves. Even though she did not consciously borrow from *The White Goddess*, she writes intuitively and is not always aware of the influences at work. The title alone—*Emlyn’s Moon*—is suggestive of Graves; the contents strengthen the connection to Graves’s moon goddess. Nia, who is doing a creative project for school, can only work by moonlight; on moonless nights she finds her canvas unlovely and impossible. Emlyn, the title character, believes his mother is in the moon, and he has pictured her there in one of his paintings. In reality, Emlyn’s mother is living in a valley called “the orchard of the half moon.”<sup>6</sup> Despite a dearth of triple goddesses, only the female characters are associated with the moon,



usually a crescent moon. When Gwyn rescues Emlyn from Half Moon Orchard late at night, Nia sees Gwyn's hair bright with sunlight; as in Alexander's books, masculine intellectual magic is associated with the sun, and female intuitive magic is associated with the moon. This is a concept thoroughly explored in *The White Goddess*.

The final book of the trilogy owes a similar debt to Garner. Although Nimmo says she had not read *The Owl Service* before she wrote *The Snow Spider*, she had certainly read Garner by the time she started *The Chestnut Soldier*. Even her style changes to reflect Garner's influence: her punctuation, particularly the way she uses colons, is distinctly Garneresque. In fact, her use of colons in *Emlyn's Moon* suggests she had read Garner before she wrote the second book. *The Chestnut Soldier* is also indebted to Garner for the notion of having contemporary characters be forced to reenact an ancient legend and for the parallelism of the two plots. For British children's writers at least, Garner seems to have become as influential as Graves; he may indeed be responsible for some of Graves's continued popularity.

When asked whether she is through with the Mabinogi, Nimmo expresses uncertainty. During the composition of *The Chestnut Soldier*, she became more and more interested in the character Iolo Lloyd, Nia's little brother, and she thinks she will be returning to him one day. Whether or not Iolo's book will include borrowings from the Four Branches remains to be seen. For the moment, Nimmo is following in Susan Cooper's footsteps and writing shorter tales based on Celtic folk tales, as well as individual fantasies for children.

Except for Nancy Bond (an American), the women who have used the traditional Welsh tales as a source are English. Several of them have Welsh grandparents and have spent holidays in Wales, but their upbringing was primarily English. Ancestral links to Wales, as well as propinquity, are no doubt responsible for the preponderance of British writers who take up Welsh themes. The American writers who have attempted to incorporate the Welsh materials are invariably visitors to Wales; it is almost as if the country itself triggers the inspiration that leads these writers to the Mabinogion.

Although male writers like Garner and Alexander "discovered" the Four Branches, the Welsh material has been mined almost exclusively by women in the past two decades. Unfortunately for the British women writers, Garner's achievement with *The Owl Service* has overshadowed and perhaps overinfluenced their best work, not that Garner's influence matters to their audience. Children and young adults can read all of

these fantasies with pleasure; a prior knowledge of Welsh traditional literature is not a prerequisite to enjoyment.

## NOTES

1. The Tir na n-Og Award is presented in two categories: 1) the best children's book in Welsh, and 2) the best children's book in English with an authentic Welsh background. In recent years the award committee has often withheld the prize in the second category. According to Menna Lloyd Williams of the Welsh Books Council, the committee feels that the quality of the eligible titles has fallen too low to warrant a prize.

2. Rachel Bromwich has gathered together the extant Welsh triads in her book *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*.

3. Quotes from Louise Lawrence are taken from a personal letter dated 7 March 1991.

4. According to Jenny Nimmo, the Smarties Grand Prix is a junior Booker Prize run by the Book Trust. Instead of a medal, the winner receives a substantial amount of money.

5. Quotes from Jenny Nimmo are taken from a personal interview conducted on 9 November 1990.

6. This valley gives its name to the American edition of *Emlyn's Moon*, which is entitled *Orchard of the Crescent Moon*.

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# Conclusion

Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said: "one *can't* believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

*Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

So might a veteran fantasy reader respond to a reality-minded child. Fantasy depends on our ability to believe impossible things. Many people assume that children have an easier time suspending their disbelief than do adults, but I suspect personality plays a larger role than age. Readers who choose fantasy usually retain their appreciation for that mode of writing, and continual practice hones their ability to believe impossible things so that, in adulthood, they can equal the White Queen's six before breakfast. Fantasy written specifically for young readers teaches them the conventions of the genre—programs their minds, as it were, towards certain expectations. Some of those expectations come from a childhood reading of fairy tales, myth, and legend: the hero will accomplish his or her tasks and win a reward, or, in myth and

legend, die gloriously and be remembered forever; the villains will be properly punished; and ultimately the good guys will win. Nothing could be more satisfactory. Fantasy for children continues the tradition.

How much does this audience affect the material? Not at all, I would say. It would be more accurate to say that our perceptions of the child audience affect our choices as writers, editors, publishers, parents, teachers. If we perceive children as natural innocents who come to us trailing clouds of glory, we will try to protect them from ideas and topics which we, as the cultural gatekeepers, think would harm their innocence. Like Sidney Lanier, we would excise passages that might have a corrupting influence. If we were subversive writers who call such actions censorship, we would try to outwit the gatekeepers in order to tell children the truth. One of the best methods to bypass the gatekeepers is to write fantasy. As Ursula K. Le Guin has said, fantasy "isn't factual, but it is true" ("Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" 44).

Some of the best children's fantasy available is based on Welsh traditional literature. Like all mythic material, it lends itself to an infinite number of approaches. Although all of the translators, editors, and creative writers discussed in this volume use the Mabinogi as their basic source, each person filters it through his or her own private lens. Those who retell the legends concern themselves to a varying extent with the suitability of the material for children, and the alterations each editor makes reflects that individual's attitudes towards the material and its intended audience. Sidney Lanier's repressive moral stance was appropriate to its era and consistent throughout his life. The apparent candor of Gwyn Thomas and Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Tales from the Mabinogion* is but a reflection of a later generation's moral stance.

Creative writers do not limit themselves to a moral filter. The stuff of myth is amorphous and can be molded into any shape a writer can envision. Kenneth Morris obviously applied a theosophical approach to the Welsh legends, using whatever elements fit into his reconstructed mythology. Lloyd Alexander looked at the Mabinogi through American eyes—more particularly Philadelphian eyes—and propounded a political ideology appropriate to the cradle of liberty. However, his concepts of heroism and honor reflect his personal experience of war rather than his American mindset. Jenny Nimmo uses the same source to explore a child's sense of self-worth, death and loss, and deep psychic trauma. In Alan Garner's hands, the Welsh material is polarized by an electromagnetic charge (one of his favorite images), to set parent against child, Welsh against English, male against female, intellect against intuition, privilege against deprivation, middle class against working class. Some-

how the Mabinogi provides a platform for all of these different approaches. Like biblical exegesis, interpretations of the Four Branches can support any number of conflicting theses.

The only way to assess the importance of the Mabinogi in children's literature is to examine its influence and effects. Several of the best-known writers in the field built their reputations on works based on the Welsh legends. Just as the Four Branches influenced Garner and Alexander, so these two writers in turn have affected other children's authors. Sometimes writers strive to emulate Garner's style (for example, Louise Lawrence), and sometimes they are intimidated by his accomplishments (Jenny Nimmo). American authors like Nancy Bond seek out Welsh traditional materials that the literary lions have passed over. Occasionally an independent thinker will use the tales with a total lack of concern for what others have done with them; Joan Aiken's *The Stolen Lake* is the result of such an approach.

When considering the role of Welsh legends in children's literature, the influence of Lady Charlotte Guest and Robert Graves cannot be overestimated. Guest's translation not only made the Mabinogi and much related folklore available to English-speaking audiences, but it also provided material to Lanier and the many editors who came after him and inspiration to Morris, Graves, Garner, Alexander, and other creative writers. Celtic scholars tend to belittle Guest's achievements, following the lead of several later translators who claimed that Guest mistranslated and bowdlerized the Welsh text. But consider the source of those accusations: if these other translators admitted that Guest's work was linguistically accurate and stylistically beautiful, then their own work was a waste of time. As a result of the proliferation of charges against Guest, her work has fallen into disfavor among Celtists. Only fantasy writers seem to appreciate her magnificent translation.

Graves, having found his inspiration in Guest's volumes, in turn inspired those who followed him. Except for Kenneth Morris, who predates Graves, all of the fantasy writers who have drawn from the Mabinogi have also been influenced by *The White Goddess*. In some ways it seems as if Graves has become a necessary link between the Welsh legends and the modern fantasy that borrows from them. For the two major figures—Garner and Alexander—*The White Goddess* was much more than an influence: it was as important a source as the Mabinogi itself.

Graves's influence reaches beyond the boundaries of children's literature; the *MLA Bibliography* lists many articles that link *The White*

*Goddess* to writers for adults: James Joyce, Thomas Pynchon, Ted Hughes, Paul Blackburn, Tennessee Williams. Something about Graves's triple goddess has gripped the poetic imagination of several generations of writers. I find it intriguing that most of these writers have been men. I would have thought that feminists would find more inspiration in a goddess, but perhaps Graves's ambivalence about his muse attracts men with a similar ambivalence towards women. The only women writers I have found whose children's fantasies were influenced by Graves are Louise Lawrence and Jenny Nimmo, and for both of them the influence was a secondhand one filtered through Garner.

For modern fantasy writers, Garner and Alexander take the place of Guest and Graves. Now children's writers must measure their work against *The Owl Service* and the *Chronicles of Prydain*. The close association between the Mabinogi and Garner in Britain and between the Mabinogi and Alexander in America is unfortunate in a way, because it discourages a fresh approach by younger writers who fear unfavorable comparisons. When enough time has passed, however, and reviewers and readers alike are not so aware of the *Chronicles of Prydain* and *The Owl Service*, new voices may emerge to tell the story of the Welsh prince who ruled the Underworld, the giant who could not be contained in a house, and the magicians who created a woman from the flowers of the oak and broom and meadowsweet.

As can be expected, there is a wide range of literary quality in children's literature based on the Mabinogi. *The Owl Service* is the standard bearer for the imaginative fiction; it is a brilliant work that can stand up to comparison with the best literature written for any age. Like Rudyard Kipling, Garner approaches writing as a specialized craft, and he well deserves the title of master craftsman. Alexander's books are also of excellent quality. Although they lack the psychological depth of *The Owl Service*, their pace, humor, and characterization more than make up for it. It is too early to make a judgment on Jenny Nimmo. Her books, particularly *The Chestnut Soldier*, seem fairly pedestrian at a first reading, but closer examination reveals intriguing emotional depth. Morris is definitely an acquired taste, and his theosophical intent often overwhelms the story. Of those whose use of the Mabinogi is peripheral, Susan Cooper and Joan Aiken offer the best literary experience for young readers. Some prefer Madeleine L'Engle, but *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* does not live up to the high standard of *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Among the retellings, quality fluctuates wildly, from the stately grandeur of Gwyn Thomas and Kevin Crossley-Holland to the comic-book simplicity of Rhiannon Ifans. Sidney Lanier's work is marred by his

lack of sympathy and understanding for the Welsh tales, and many other retellings get mangled in their editors' didactic purposes. Gwyn Jones's lively rendition of the Welsh legends has considerable literary merit, as does the collaboration between Thomas and Crossley-Holland. However, none of the children's adaptations can compare with Charlotte Guest's beautifully rendered translation, and no translation or retelling even approaches the beauty of the original Welsh text.

The Mabinogi has played a major role in the history of children's fantasy. No other group of traditional tales has inspired so many creative artists to produce works of imagination that rival the best adult literature can offer. The Welsh tales share the appeal of fairyland; in fact, the Wales of the Mabinogi seems a veritable wonderland in its own right. The characters have odd, exotic names, giants roam the countryside, and unearthly hounds with glowing red eyes chase magical stags through the forests. Here there most definitely be dragons. No wonder the fantasy writers return to this source for inspiration.



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